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Playscript: The Fall Guy, Act I

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Theatre

Australia

June 1977

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COMMENT

It has often been noted that the fare here bears a strong resemblance to that of the West End 18 months or two years before. Almonds last year, there were plenty of our own plays — Hibberd's *A Touch of Melba*, Wilkeson's *The Department* and *A Handful of French*, Power's *Last of the Amishmen*, Cove's *The Gift* and others. But the traffic is one way. These Australian plays are unlikely to be in the West End season of two years hence.

Don's Party and *What If I've Got Tomorrow* did make it — and there was *The Doll* and now *Steve Rogers* (these seasons are few and at least sporadic). We begin to ask why.

The Australian Film Commission is doing some what better. *Let The Balloon Go* is an ode to the United States, *People at Rayner Rock* there and in Britain, *Don and the Kangaroo* (an animated full-length feature film) has been sold to Germany, and *Cadillac* is soon to be released in Britain. These, along with numerous shorts dubbed in many languages, have been sold abroad a good record, consistent and developing. The reason seems to be solid marketing; the Film Commission has agents in countries throughout the world — Britain, America and Europe — and at present is particularly interested in breaking into the Latin American market. A delegation is off to Canada, not for the prize but for the sales platform; it provides for such new films as *Raw Deal*, *The Singer and the Dancer* and *Feminine 3*. The international market provides the profit where the home market covers basic costs.

The ABC, often conservative, has a similar dynamical approach to overseas sales. Again, it has agents in London for Britain and Europe, and in Canada and the United States. The policy is for all major productions to be sent abroad for potential sale, and a good deal does get sold to the English and European markets. *Right now*, *Power Without Glory* and *Certain Powers* are on air in England and *A Big Country* and *Wild Australia* have been sold.

What is being done for the sale of the performing arts abroad? The Federal Government makes notes about light budgets, and for the first time there has been any kind of cultural programme (since the mid-sixties), that programme has been included as part of Foreign Affairs activity. Australia has only one cultural attaché, one in Jakarta and the other in Tokyo — none in English-speaking countries. The policy is that attaches be focused on the Asian area. There the record is not bad for visits by ballet companies, orchestras, chamber-music groups, painting and photographic exhibitions. No theatre gets to Asia because it runs against the language barrier. True cultural exchange, not one-

way traffic, is needed for Australian culture to be enriched and, importantly, for our contribution to enrich the whole English-speaking tradition. Other countries obviously feel this need. The British Council has offices all over the world, including Australia, with the task of promoting all aspects of British performing arts through bringing out companies and circulating publications and scripts, and each year pays for someone — a designer, actor or director — to come out and work with an Australian company.

The Australia Council, which could perhaps act as a central body for overseas promotion, is the Film Commission or the British Council does, has little money for overseas fieldwork. And, despite a founding principle "to promote Australian art at other cost", it appears to view this as a low priority. Theatre companies can use the council's good-will to do tour productions overseas if they wish, and, more directly, the Australia Council does fund individuals to attend international theatre conferences and seminars. The money the council has is restricted, it is true, but then comes the question of priorities.

The Association of Australian Artists was founded in London at the end of 1975 with the intention of promoting new Australian drama, showing Australian talent at its best, and actively promoting the creative theatrical image of Australia abroad. So far, it has managed to get *Myra and The Christmas Brother* to the Marnaud, and McNell's *The Old Forester* *After* — to critical reviews — at the Roundhouse. McNell's play was sponsored by the Jan Hani, the chairman, personally. At the moment the association is organising for a three-month season of hard-core theatre at the King's Head Theatre Pub. It also puts on rehearsal readings in odd rooms in Australia House (rent-free) in the hope that a full-scale West End production may result.

The AAA applied for a grant from Canberra, but none has been received. Australian-based companies in Britain have donated a total of 15 pounds in contributions.

Perhaps the only short-term hope of becoming a recognised branch of the English-speaking theatre tradition is via the commercial theatre. Ransom has it that Ray Lawrence will be appearing in London before long, and even that Gordon Chait might be going with *The Disappearance of Benjamin Franklin* to New York. Entrepreneurs Paul Elliot and Bernard Jay, facing much maligned about bringing shows in, are also negotiating to take the Australian product to other countries.

Let's hope that by some lucky accident — there's no design — it's not too long before our great successes are playing consistently in the West End and on Broadway. And that eventually the Government will wake up to the need for proper financial representation abroad for the performing arts as the way the Film Commission and the ABC have for film and TV.

Theatre Australia

Editor Robert Page
Executive Editor Lucy Wagan
Associate Editor Bruce Knappell
Assistant Joyce Farrell

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Production John Curtin
Art Director Alex Salt
Production Editor Forbes Miller

Correspondents

Sydney, Joe Morgan (02) 454 2864
Melbourne, Raymond Stanley (03) 418 1204
Wellington, Don Ralston (07) 354 9375
Perth, Joan Australia (09) 24 0470
Adelaide, Richard Morley (08) 179 2306

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“QUOTES & QUERIES”

THERAPEUTIC THEATRE IN DIFFICULTY

JUDY HICKTON, Arts Access, Melbourne: “The survival of Arts Access, an innovative community arts project, is threatened after three years of successful operation. Linking up arts resources, particularly in the performing arts, with welfare needs, the project in this time has reached more than 27,000 individuals and isolated people in prisons, hospitals, training centres and children's homes in Melbourne, and more recently throughout Victoria.

“The programme has obvious advantages for all participants: arts organisations reach new audiences, while health and welfare groups benefit in terms of enjoyment and personal and social growth.



“The Victorian Government has so far declined to fund Arts Access. While recognising the value of the project, each State Government body — that is Arts, Welfare and Health — has suggested that another body is a more appropriate source of funds. The combination of arts and welfare, so fruitful in practice, on the financial side appears to be a liability.

“We believe that, for the health and welfare group, the arts are not just icing on the cake, but should be considered as an integral part of any therapeutic programme. Our task is now to persuade the community and the Government of the value of the contribution the arts make to these groups and the enormous potential for innovation.”

THE ARTS OF EVERYDAY

DONNA CREAVES, artistic consultant, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology: “A major problem facing artists today is how to operate as a genuine part of the working environment.

“What RMIT Union has realised is that they can provide salaries, along with day-to-day running costs and a wide range of facilities, to enable a group of artists from different disciplines to work together inside the campus community for eight weeks to 10 days.

“The artists include Noraine Hannell, Eva Kanczarg, Libby Demster, Bill Fontana, Simon Hopkinson, Russell Curran, David Macfarlane, Stephen Jones.

“Initially, the artists will create work derived from the immediate environment which, despite structural formalism, will be presented to the campus community informally.

“The intention is not to confront students and staff with the creative process, but rather to stimulate their perception of the possibilities for creativity which are part of their everyday surroundings.

“The possibilities are enormous and for this reason the project has been entitled *The Exchange*.”

SCHIZOPHRENIA WHO'S FOR IT?

EILEEN VAN DER POORTEN, Playreading Committee, Playwrights' Conference: “I am absolutely amazed by the several ‘works’ which turn up in Playwrights' Conference entries. Last year's plays tended to include psychiatric plays with Freudian overtones and this year's entries contained a high percentage of split-personality plays in which the hero/heroine battles with an alter-ego. I've no idea what it all means, but we're doing two of the ‘split’ plays at the conference — Debbie Oswald's *Two-Way Mirror* and Rasha Hartman's *Devote Girl*.

“The plays shocked themselves very early this year, but it is a pity we will get so many Upper-North-Shore-type numbered comedies full of endless all-stage tantrums too.



“Of the plays we're not actually workshopping, we are reading professionally reviewed Matthew's exciting prison play *Twisting Dice* and John Lee's modern Chinese opera based on the Peking Opera story. I'm also doing the most exciting plays (including re-enactments of theatre companies who ask me about them, and feel that the most promising plays are getting an airing this year.”

TRUST TAKES UP TICKETS

ELTON GIBSON, Maria Street Theatre: “*Trust* has finished at the Royal, where it did terribly well, and now the Trust are taking the production — our show and our cast — to Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane and Adelaide, which takes it up to the end of August (starting from 23 May in Melbourne). Naturally, we're all delighted and the cast are thrilled to be going on tour. It has definitely been the most successful show this theatre has ever done, though *Something's Afoot* ran for 10 weeks longer than usual for us. We can't anticipate further commercial backing, but the phone is ringing hot for *Double Edge* and we're all got our fingers crossed. Next we've got *The Muppet Master* by Feydman, then *Confessions*, the new Alex Aycockson which was in the West End last year. We will present it in Australia. We're happy to stay where we are, happily being enjoyed by all and sundry.”

ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERTISE IN SA

TONY FREEMAN, Adelaide Festival Centre: “The season we're so busy, and doing so well, is that the Festival Centre Trust is the biggest entrepreneur in South Australia. Since July 1978, it has entrepreneured 132 performances of 35 different attractions, which have played to more than 180,000 people! The performances ranged across all entertainment from film to musicals, and have included overseas artists and companies, interstate artists and companies, and several locally initiated shows. The biggest success has been *My Pet Friend* in the Playhouse, which played to 100 per cent capacity houses every night. Also the Gilbey and Sullivan musical in the Playhouse at Christmas played to 50,000 people, and recently the Victorian State Opera's *La Traviata* did very well in its five-night season. The SATC in 1977 is having the best houses of any season they've ever done. *School For Scandal* was their best

show over.

"At the moment, we're preparing for a controversial production of *The Moon* directed by Alex Hay, which will go on in the Space. Alex Hay first did the play last year in Perth, and we will be touring it to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane and Tasmania. It's the first Festival Centre production that we are touring. This time will be touring Mr. Fox & Friends, possibly with Lynn Redgrave in the lead. The ACT is always hand over the things they can't do when they go on in the Festival Centre — they think we do a better — so we will be managing *Forrest* while it's here."

"We also have a very strong commitment to local community theatre, and from June to mid-July are bringing three new Australian productions, with professional directors and using the pool of talent from the amateur scene here, into the Space for a season called ACT 3. First will be a double bill, *Moving* by Veronica Swaney and *Colours* by Philip Murphy directed by Martin Christmas, then *Don't Paddle Against the Wind*, *Water* by Ken Kesey, directed by Patrick Frost, and last a musical called *Flood* by Tony Strachan, directed by Malcolm Haylock. And they're all Adelaide writers."

MTC TO GET NEW PRODUCTION HQ

SINCE SENIEMILL, Melbourne Theatre Company: "On 4 April, the Vice-Chancellor of the Melbourne University, and chairman of the MTC board of management, Professor David Durham, announced the purchase of the 75,000-sq-metre, Nathan Binge Building in South Melbourne for the Melbourne Theatre Company's administrative and production headquarters."

"The State Government financed the purchase of the building (\$92,000). For the past 10 years the MTC has been housed in a building owned by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works in Normanby Road, South Melbourne. The company has been trying the building which is in a dilapidated state and will be required for roadworks after the completion of the Westgate Bridge. The MTC will transfer its operations into the new building progressively over the next few months, though things probably won't be finished there for several years."

"The company is obviously delighted with this move to a permanent headquarters, and is most grateful to the Victorian Premier, Mr. Horner and his Government for their continuing generous support."

WHY SLIDES FOR AMATEURS?

ABNE NEEVE, National Theatre People: "As a State drama company we shouldn't have to be in the business of subsidising ourselves. But in effect, that's what we're doing. We have to play for a commercial audience, usually with an imported

star."

"I am opposed to bringing in overseas stars because that often deprives our own actors and tends to re-inforce the general public's parochial opinion that all local talent are poor. I'm certainly not opposed to commercialism but we shouldn't have to depend on them. We are a subsidised drama company, not a commercial management."

"But if we don't have a commercial success downtown, we can't do any production of experimental theatre in the Greenroom."

"One problem is that our State funding-body is depressing us spending. In effect, it is subsidising amateur theatre. That money should go to the professional theatre. In this way we could bring the very best to the public and extend the plan more fully our present involvement with workshops, education and amateur groups."

SUBURB ENTERTAINMENT

CHARLIE MANN, of *Mac*: "Hopefully we're helping Australian legitimate theatre stay alive. It is up to groups like us and off *Theater Area*. People these days are seeking out entertainment in the theatre, a real good night out. We are optimistic about theatre and about shows like ours, and because people are standing up and saying



what they think about Australian theatre, I shoulder when I think that not very good overseas productions attract audiences when local shows with top local actors don't pull them in as well, just because overseas people are seen on TV. *Mac* is a family show and has brought many people back two or three times to see it. We do change, but basically it is the same show. We would like to do a TV comedy series or show. I'm optimistic about our Sydney season, word of mouth has helped a lot up here, especially with the younger audiences."

■ Eric Carr has booked *Mac* for an indefinite run, which started in Sydney in April at the Speakeasy.



MULTI-MEDIA MESSAGE

LUCY WAGNER, executive editor, *Theatre Australia*: "The theatre — always with *Mac*, "the biggest multi-media show in the world", currently touring Australia, has something of the atmosphere of a travelling magic-lantern show. The three huge, slightly translucent screens, and stereoscopes installed along the entire front of the auditorium, and on the night I saw it, the lights of the show to start (or to end) it remain, and the sporadic appearance of normal-looking, painted technicians gave something of the impression even before the show started. Eventually, the screens lit up and flickering slides and the odd film-clip, mostly superimposed either on each other or on psychedelic patterns, began to appear. The first section is on the birth and early days of rock, but usually not in chronological order, not with music synchronised to visuals, even with the film-slides."

The slides and films of the young Beatles — in the Cavern, at the Albert Hall, in the street, in the bath — can hardly fail to evoke some degree of nostalgia, but as the show goes on the slides become less and less chronologically ordered, and they and the music less related to each other. Slides and films of, for example, Moore, the Ohio student killings, beautiful women and naked black girls (to the music of "Blackbird") begin to predominate over the Beatles themselves."

By the end one has heard of (and a few notes of) most Beatles (and post-Beatles) songs, though there are some notable exceptions, and probably some mist of the photos and film shots, including clips of all their films, of the Beatles that exist, but the way they are put together seems totally ad hoc."

Overall, the show adds up to neither a full and comprehensive biography of the Beatles, showing the development of their music, nor a commentary on what their musical and sociological influences have been on the women and early seventies, it isn't even a sophisticated re-edition of nostalgia — unless the projections and camera speed remind you of home movies. Often the music is painfully loud, the slides annoyingly flickery and the slides flicked at the audience at odd and unrelated times make viewing impossible. The saddest thing is it could — should — have been so good, with material like that it must be hard to go wrong."

THE OLD TOTE

In *Theatre Journal* No. 8 (March/April) Martin Thornick reported as author five-essable items on the pilot short course in Theatre Administration conducted by NIDA in February of the year. In one instance, my own impression was that the NIDA short course was most satisfactory as a course, and for a substantial number of the participants.

My main criticisms of the pilot course relate to:

- (i) Underestimating selection criteria
- (ii) Poor teaching methods
- (iii) Inadequate preparation
- (iv) Inappropriate staffing
- (v) *Televised course* Approximately 50 people attended the pilot short course, representing interest as diverse as professional theatre companies, amateur theatre groups, theatre centres, symphony orchestras.

The level of experience of the people attending, and their expectations of the course, varied greatly and this made the appropriate level of instruction very difficult to establish. I think also that courses in theatre administration can have several different purposes, and therefore separate courses, or at least streaming within the one course, is desirable.

For example separate courses could be established for:

- (a) Experienced theatre administrators to assist to evaluate their own effectiveness and update their approaches.
- (b) Incorporated theatre administrators (whether artists or administrators) particularly to give a basic grounding in theatre administration.
- (c) Amateur administrators to study and develop appropriate administrative procedures for their own organisations, drawing on general principles of arts management.
- (d) *Teaching method* In the pilot short course the teaching method adopted was the presentation at lectures to the whole group. In the course of the lectures, questions were invited; however, extensive cross discussion, or between lecturers and participants, or between participants themselves, was generally discouraged. On the whole, the lecturers were unsuccessful in establishing an understanding of the subject matter at the level was often too advanced for some participants, yet elementary for others. One result of this was that the whole of some lectures was lost to many participants. I believe it may be a common experience that one of the most valuable sessions was the Thursday afternoon when a considerable time was spent examining, in an informal way, the administrative records and procedures of

NIDA staff. By contrast the speakers on Old Tote methods of financial control probably left many participants with little useful information.

I believe that a more appropriate teaching method would be seminars and discussion-groups. Guest lecturers could briefly outline the basics of a particular subject area, the group could then break into smaller groups to pursue lines of interest under guidance of guest lecturers and the course staff.

(iii) *Preparation for the course* To me, it was obvious that there was insufficient preparation for the pilot short course, on the part of the course staff and of the guest lecturers. Several of the lecturers simply talked on an anecdotal way "off the cuff". While this approach certainly can be very interesting, a generally correct, factual, concise survey of the subject matter, backed up by written material. For example, when dealing with budgeting, I think it is important for lecturers/discussants to be supported by the pre-jerms that the lecturers the material use in the preparation of their own organisation's budget. This would give a clear indication of the steps involved.

With regard to the preparation of the course itself, I believe that the failure of the three "practical exercises" to crystallise was just one indication that the course was under-prepared, or insufficiently thought out in terms of the time available for instruction.

(iv) *Staffing* The staffing approach of the pilot short course was to invite, as guest lecturers, executives of the major performing arts companies, particularly the Old Tote. In many cases, this led to the situation where the lecturer was discussing procedures, not in general terms, but in terms of the operation of his/her own particular company. Often this information was irrelevant to most participants, who face problems entirely different in both scale and nature to those of the major performing arts organisations. (One example of this was the possibility created by one lecturer that the administrator/production manager may be faced with the necessity of reducing technical staff from 40 to six while on tour away from the city theatre.)

In the pilot short course the choice of guest lecturers was often appropriate. Michael Cosloy to talk about Actors' Equity, Ken Warley to talk about legal matters and fund-raising, the Department of Services representative to talk about theatre licensing. However, in other cases the guest lecturers talked in a prescriptive way about structures or procedures, rather than relating their own

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approach, and relating this to general principles. One example of this was the inclusion of several lawyers that a broad of directors structure is both desirable and inevitable. In fact, several groups represented at the course are consciously exploring and developing alternative approaches to responsibility and management, e.g. co-ventures, artist participation in management, commercial enterprises etc.

In this analysis of the pilot short course, I have dwelt upon the problems and failures of the course in order to provide a critical input into the evaluation process. To balance this, I would like to say that even the pilot short course was of value to many participants, both through the material presented and from the opportunity to meet other administrative personnel. The range of subjects covered by the course was comprehensive and forms a good basis for future courses. It might, however, be necessary to extend the duration of the course to permit an effective discussion and learning process.

I believe that there is a very great need in Australia for short courses in theatre administration, the strong response to the NIDA course, both from New South Wales and interstate, is just one indication of the deficiency in our arts/education structure. The National Institute of Dramatic Arts is an appropriate institution in New South Wales to conduct short courses in theatre administration (all her institutions also may have the capacity and resources to establish such courses), however, a much more thoughtful and considered approach should be taken to the preparation and conduct of the course in the future.

PETER SUTHERLAND,
Administrator,
Caulfield Children's Theatre.

Your anonymous article in the March/April issue of *Theatre Australia* is right in saying that the Australian Performing Group played (mostly) to bad notices in Perth and (mainly) to poor audiences in Adelaide. As for looking like "fish out of water" when moved from the "super-ranchettes" of the Prairies, it might be useful to look for causes other than the lack of creative comforts afforded by our modest patronage in Melbourne. The great majority of our touring productions have been enthusiastically attended and rapturously received. Your editor Lucy Wagner asked me for a comment on "going national". At the time I thought it was too early, but with the Hills Family visiting them in Sydney, Scorching Circus having performed to more than 40,000 people this year, Max Githen (renowned for his "affected accent") in demand from Darwin to Hobart for his performance in *Stretch of the Imagination*, I can assure your somewhat churchy constancy that our cash-flow is good, morale high, and intention, as usual, proceeds on spite of our disappointed dreams as not because of them.

JOHN TIMLIN,
Australian Performing Group.
A Lucy Wagner points out that the item,

"Out of Creative Wastage" (*Theatre Australia*, April/May, p. 3) had nothing to do with any comment by Mr Timlin, and that it was written by an independent contributor.

I was interested to read in your Correspondence section of *Theatre Australia* the statement that had been made about lack of training here for the theatre and that you intended to follow this up.

The newly formed 640 Drama School (initiated by John Hewitt of the Killara 640 Theatre), following the failure to purchase the Independent Theatre School of Dramatic Arts is providing very good training for the theatre.

It is an evening school only, at the moment, with three core classes of movement with Kath. Ray, speech and acting with additional classes in dialect, make-up, script study, film and TV techniques and practical experience with workshop productions every five weeks and professional plays. The acting training covers every aspect of theatre styles and our staff have been trained at RADA, the Royal Academy of Music and Drama, the Old Vic School, as well as being working directors from the theatre and the ABC and professional editors. We are having our own premises built at Murrumbidgee, with our own theatre and video room.

GILLIAN OWEN
Director, 640 Drama School,
Murrumbidgee, NSW.

Your editorial (*Theatre Australia*, March/April) came in a challenge ("All the eternal truths running around in our little parish" . . .), so I hope you will consider the parish of Sydney's suburbs (containing a quarter of the city's population in the west/south area) and allow me to introduce FRINGE.

Fringe is a committee made up of representatives from more than 20 amateur theatre groups, covering an area that extends from Turramurra in the north to Springwood in the west, and Camden in the south (each of these is more than 40km apart).

The committee began with the Whitlam Government's attention to the previously neglected western suburbs, and has had support help from Arthur Pike, then a member of the Theatre Board, as well as funding grants which enabled the committee to employ a professional director to visit each group to instruct and advise. Each year a festival has been held which attracts critics from 12 or more groups, and this year a combined production was presented.

Membership currently includes one professional theatre, the Q Theatre which has supported Fringe theatre in many ways, and which has moved out from Sydney to Parramatta. It also includes the Duff Theatre of NSW, which has performed in the Seymour Centre, and the Youth Theatre Workshop, which was able to make a real contribution to the Sydney Festival by presenting a home-grown musical of relevance and quality. The

Saint Mary's Road

As I see it, these amateur activities are absolutely essential to the sophisticated professional world, as they provide the grass-roots in training the community to regard theatre as at least as valid as football or cricket. I believe the recent report on the arts supports my belief, and I take your editorial to imply that you also hold no brief for a dead museum culture operating in an elite ghetto.

Yours outside the ghetto, in Fringe,

JEAN BURTON
Camden, NSW.

Re "Vision and Myth" William Showbridge on the Kinetic Energy Dance Company and the Dance of Life Company (*Theatre Australia*, March/April).

As an artist and as a dancer, I have been involved if not compelled to speak.

Mr Showbridge stated, "Practically any fool can walk in all the street, put on a costume and act, but people who are willing to put in for the grueling years of training and daily exercises as well as the stringent self-discipline to keep themselves in shape just to go into an amateur dance company for no financial remuneration, don't exist."

Still I take him by the hand and lead him through the steps of New York, London, Paris (yes, and even Melbourne) to show him the apertures conditions in which dancers live and grow? Dancers do not dance for money, but for art itself. They deny all in order to give all. They dance whenever, wherever, they are given the opportunity.

I was appalled by Mr Showbridge's lack of sensitivity in understanding and appreciating modern creative dance. Quite by accident I attended the Dance of Life Company's presentation of *The Phoenix*. I immediately went back to view the next performance. It was by far the most creative, most inventive, most original dance company which I have ever witnessed in Australia. Melbourne appreciated it, as seen by the continuing sold-out houses. Paris would be more than happy to have it. Let the photos instructed in the review speak for themselves!

I do wish that Mr Showbridge would stick to classical ballet criticism and leave modern creative dance alone, for it is quite evident that he lacks the insight to judge anything new of value. Better yet, if Mr Showbridge would graciously bid out of a scriptorium and depend on his "insight depth" rather than a paralytic, then creative dance would rejoice in the outcome, even if he did manage to land on his ass.

RICHARD BOULFEZ
Cambridge, Vic.

William Showbridge points to his continuing concern with the Dance Company NSW and the Australian Dance Theatre to show his enthusiasm for modern Australian ballet/dance. His contention is simply that there are amateur groups "Maggie that lack of choreographic ability with costumes, effects, dances and even, simplifications."

A CHORUS LINE

Sydney production
photographed by Peter Holderness

William Shoubridge
previews
"An innovation
of terrific magnitude"

The concept of *A Chorus Line* is disconcertingly simple. There are 17 dancers auditioning for parts in a Broadway show, but only eight (four male, four female) are needed. The selection, wooing-out and auditioning for those eight constitutes the format and the dramatic tension of the musical (no trouble with plot-points in this show, that it is the dramatized process, played on a stage and thus defined, that has had

American and British audiences stomping out seats and which has almost overnight put this show into the attic of the American musical theatre. Never before have critics been so unanimous in their praise and audiences so genuinely involved.

It is a backstage musical, and Broadway has a heavy history of such shows, but this one, because of the intense personal in-





involvement in the situation, breaks the barriers of the form. 4-Chorus Line, by implication, and by projecting its theme out into the lives of "ordinary" people (not heroes), for those audiences who have lost it, a palpable symbol of personal assertion, desperation, hope, dignity, and the right to start again if one has failed. It is, in effect, the glitziest job-interview: an arena where one's qualities and abilities are put on the

line, tested and, if good enough, used.

Wayzack Lee, member of the original cast and Michael Bennett's assistant on such shows as *Julius Company* and *Promises, Promises*, who is here to direct the Sydney cast, says that this is the love and the fantasy of the show that makes it affecting.

"Also things," she says. "Audiences watch a group of dancers being forced to

talk about themselves and why they chose this sort of livelihood. They see the things that come over these dancers as the show strips away their protective barriers and makes them see themselves anew. But more than that. Hopefully, the audience will change instead of taking it out, someone making their own choices about who should be selected and who shouldn't, they will come to identify with these per-





ple up on stage — seems to realize that the situation applies to them as well, in their own way. The show should give people a sense of the importance of human dignity.”

But why has *A Chorus Line* made such an enormous impact? Its music is uncatchable but hardly memorable; there are some dreadful clichés in the text and the staging (especially for those used to the

usual J.W. over-decoration) is extremely routine.

“*A Chorus Line* arrived at just the right moment,” says Bayrock. “Broadway — America — was ready for us.”

True enough, the show might have flopped miserably a few years ago. But now it is here at a time when Americans, and because of their pervasive influence, the rest of the Western world, are fed up

with faked glamour, with immorality, when those in authority can no longer be trusted. After Vietnam and Watergate, the American psyche took a severe beating. People lost their faith and their self-esteem; thus, there was very little to grab hold of and believe in. What audience wanted for a change was honesty.

Dancing is probably one of the most honest artistic expressions there is. You





cannot disguise lack of technique or individuality. Unless you have natural rhythm, as you don't. If the body is not fit and disciplined, it just is not perfect, and if your heart isn't in it, it will show down.

"But," says Miss Lee, "dancers, especially Broadway dancers, have been put down for so long. For a lot of them it's their only livelihood, and it is getting harder and harder all the time. Dancers

have always been a back-ground for the star, nothing more. This show makes people realize that dancers are human beings too."

The inevitable question arises concerning the abilities of the kids in the *Australian* cast. "They are young," says Miss Lee, "and therefore there is a hell of a lot of enthusiasm there."

But that is not enough. "These kids have

been put through the same sort of trials as we had in the original team," she says. "True, the Australian kids aren't as experienced as we were, but a lot of themselves has come out in the work that we've done together already. Audiences are going to see a lot of love in this show."

"Anyway, this cast is lucky. It's been postponed, just as we in the original were. The other cast, the London, San Fran-





ance, Toronto and Los Angeles cuts — well, we just changed them out like a tape, at an incredibly quick rate. Things are more relaxed here, and the kids are so dedicated."

But one still doesn't know how the Sydney audience will react to it (although, by the time this article appears, the show will have properly aired after three weeks of previews, and judgment will have been passed).

Miss Lee plays it safe: "I have taken note around the city," she notes, "and I've been amazed at the number of people who have already seen the show in the States and loved it and are going to see it here and who are going to tell their friends to go. I think it will work wonderfully."

Whatever the final outcome, at the moment of writing, the show has received more than 49,000 advance bookings, is

there's anticipatory interest at least.

"It's not particularly American," Miss Lee says emphatically, "it is about dancers, and by extension, people in general. Audiences will understand."

Where to from here? "I really don't know. I don't see the problem who comes after us. We have, in a way, broken the mold. The old musicals won't work after this. But we didn't worry about that when we started the show, we just gathered together with a collective feeling that Broadway was dying and maybe there was something we could do about it. We did it, we were honest about it, there was no beating about the bush and, well, we have changed the face of the industry. Some people disliked the show. Stephen Sondheim, for example, hated it."

Scar grapes, perhaps, for snatching the thunder of the Tony Awards from his

Pacific Grove? "I don't know," she says. "I want this sort of thing."

Sondheim and Prince have been for a long time typed as the "innovators" of Broadway. A Chorus Line is an innovation of such terrible magnitude that perhaps there is little left but for the others to pick up the pieces of an expanded form and try again. But *A Chorus Line* didn't go out of its way to be innovative, merely for its own sake, the content dictated the form.

"We didn't realize to start with that it would make such an impact," says Miss Lee. "But even if it had flopped, all of us in the cast would have gone out to work with new energy and knowledge. We would have been proud to be dancers. Like I said, it's a show about dignity."

THIRING:

"I hate directing . . . I loathe actors. I think they are the dumbest people . . ."



Few people can be unaware of Frank Thiring, whose larger-than-life stage performances, suspense-type film roles and elsewhere we have made him into a living legend. Countless Thiring tales are told embellished with lively vocal impersonations. Once looked upon as either a joke, then considered a him, today he is mainly regarded with awe and respect by fellow-theatres, particularly the younger ones.

Thiring began in radio — as sound-effects boy — at a period when most actors were working a 12-hour day in radio studios. While one day an actor was too exhausted to perform, Thiring said, "I can play that part", and, since his father owned

the radio station, nobody dared deny him the role gained him a Laurence Olivier Award. He then went into radio in a big way, becoming well known, and created on radio the aboriginal detective Napoleon Bonaparte in a series adapted and directed by Morris West.

Around this time, Ray Lawler wrote his first play, *Mad's Ball*, about a re-incarnation of Henry VIII staged by the amateur Middle Park Repertory Theatre. Since Thiring at 19 resembled the much-married monarch, he was cast in the role, and the play successfully transferred to the National Theatre, run by Gertrude Johnson and William F Carr. From this Thiring graduated to the non-professional Little

Theatre Company (later known as the St. Martin's), working for Irene Mitchell, earning money by day in radio.

After the war, Thiring went to Europe for two years, travelling all over the Continent and taking in all kinds of theatre not seen in Australia. This was his way of studying.

Back in Australia, he went into the Sydney Independent's touring production of *Ready Dressed* for Leon Rodnick, covered the *Twelve Curses* with Arthur Askey, played the psychiatrist opposite Doris Fenton when *Ward 13* came to Melbourne, and also went into *See How They Run*. This play, produced by Rodnick, was scheduled to tour, but Thiring, at

his own request, was released from his contract.

He then formed his own company, and for the next two years presented plays at the Astor Theatre, engaging designers like Irene Marshall, Robin Lovejoy, Alan Burke and the English-Frenchman Percy Hore. The result was not for the type of character Thring would play in the future. Hore's *Salome*, *Volpines*, *Whiteface* in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, *Countess* in *Forever Laughing*, *Orsilla* (with Zoe Caldwell as Desdemona), *Mr Delconer* in *The Green Bay Tree*, and *Oedipus Rex*. He surrounded himself with some of the best people available at the time and frequently designed the sets and costumes.

Cargill. He intended playing *Orsilla* again, but Harold Hobson, critic of the *Sunday Times*, had so praised his performance in *Salome* that the play transferred to the St Martin's and ran for a while.

Having proved he was up to West End standards, Thring became housecock and returned to Australia, where the typical comment was "Oh, he must have been an appalling disaster. Why would anybody come back to Australia?" Interested by this, Thring made certain he obtained front-page coverage when he received a cable from Anthony Quayle inviting him to join Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the cast of Peter Brook's Stratford production of *Titus Andronicus* — to play

Stoff. Here Kirk Douglas saw him perform, which led to film work for Thring playing many emperors (impressing people back home far more than the fact he had acted with the Oliviers?).

Since then, Thring has been able to play most of the parts he has wanted to, and as the legend has grown. Back in Australia, he played *Caligula* in *Prerogative* at the National, the title roles in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in the Little, and in 1959 joined the Melbourne Theatre Company (then known as the Union Theatre Repertory Company) and frequently has been one of its main forces since, enjoying a good working relationship with founder-director John



As Lord Touchwood in *Double Dealer*

Eventually Thring became bored with the Astor and asked Farley how he thought he would go down in London. "You're so extraordinary, you'd probably do quite well," he was told. (Comments Thring: "A cross between Robert Morley and Charles Laughton at the age of 25 — who could ask for anything more?")

So, together with Farley and the costumes Thring went to London and leased Jack de Leon's Q Theatre for eight weeks. Here he repeated his roles in *Salome* and *The Green Bay Tree*, appeared in *Bill Tidy* (adapted from R. L. Stevenson by Donald Prinsmore) and in between presented one play with actors like Patrick McGathran and Pinch

the evil Emperor Sauronmas

Titus was an enormous success and Thring stayed on in London, otherwise, Australia would say he had been a flop with the Oliviers! He played Captain Hook in *Fair Play*, successfully doubling the part of Darling. "The only production of *Peter Pan*", says Thring, "where Mr Cargill has scored the children more than Captain Hook".

Next Thring went into a two-night stage version of *Dance in the House* in the Victoria Palace for Jack Hylton. On the point of returning home again, he received a telephone call from Olivier inviting him to play in a revival of *Titus* to tour the Continent and then a season at London's

Summer

In his first season with the UTRC, Thring had a huge personal success playing *Abah* in Orson Welles's *Moby Dick* — *Rehearsed*, which he repeated in 1960. Other roles have included a succession of religious dignitaries, including the Archbishop in *Kommoff* and *Jeller* (programmed as H.E. Rodd), *Deserts*, *Macbeth*, appears in his roles in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and *Forever Laughing*, *Burgoyne* in *The Devil's Disciple*, *Falstaff*, *Cato* in *The Cherry Orchard*, *Sander* in *The Plan's The Thing* (as his sparkling best in a typical Thring role) and more recently the Mother Superior in *The Nun*.

Perhaps his most surprising role — and one which gave him personal satisfaction in playing — was Max in *Prince's The Hammerhead*. As he says, "I'm not anybody's idea of a 70-year-old cockney butcher who stalks his daughter-in-law, am I?" Seeing the play in London, Sumner asked he had found a marvellous part for him: "John, you must be insane," said Thring after having read the script. "Ours always covered such and velvet, and rubens, walking down flights of stairs being embraced. I don't know that I can do a cockney accent." But Thring did, won all-round critical acclaim for his performance, and gained Best Actor for 1986 award.

Thring was not present at that awards

away from the MTC. Looking back the approval of finding some consolation in another role, the role has to be something outrageous to attract him. He was of course Mr Barrett in the musical *Robbery and Sledgeham* ("I'd always wanted to play Edward Mowbray-Barrett, anyway"), was in R.W.'s *Madness 172* and went to Adelaide last year when George Upton invited him to play Othello again.

One would expect that, having once been an actor-manager, he would at some time want to form another company, but not at all. He maintains he formed one previously because it was the only way to play the roles he wanted to, now Sumner does it all for him, and much better, he believes, than

from Australia, written specially for him. He was surprised to read in an earlier issue of *Theatre Australia* that Steve Spears had written *The Misanthrope of Jerusalem* with him originally in mind. "One hardly fits into what David Williamson wrote — one hardly fits into *The Summer of the 7th Day*. One doesn't fit into the normal Australian scene, or what most Australians seem to write about, anyway."

Has he ever thought of writing a play himself? "Frequently — but I've appeared the past few. I've got a very good thriller, but I can't think of any way to end it."

A serious show? Yes, he has considered this too, but "and's first preference



With Stephen Oldfield in *The Man*

summary. *Robbery* at the time had a lot to do with the sword should have gone to Raymond Whittell for his portrayal of Dylan Thomas. Today Thring implies this was not exactly so.

"I was never happy with those awards," he says, "because the critics were all such about. I'm not sure that they've changed. One didn't pay very much attention to the critics. When they said people were terribly bad, you thought, 'Oh, screw them'; so why accept their bloody award when they say you're good? One doesn't go into a nervous breakdown when they say you're lousy, so why take it. I dislike the whole system of awards."

These days he seldom does stage work

he could do it himself. Neither has he any real desire to design sets and costumes again.

Once he directed *Governing Mr. Smeare* for the MTC ("Museum — mugs — mugs"), why not, more directing? "I hate directing," Thring declares. "I hate actors. I think they're the dumbest people, and to watch them wandering around learning their lines incessantly and screwing everything up is my idea of hell."

Thring admits there are very few roles left he wants to play. One, though, is Tamburlaine. He would have liked to play Richard III ("But now I'm too old, and too tall. I was always too tall").

Strangely, he is not delayed with plays

to do *Oscar Wilde* — and Michael MacLennan has been nice to that.

The interpretation of roles usually is a collaboration between himself and the director, in mutual agreement over the part. ("It's no good a director saying, 'I've always seen them as being dressed in glowing pink slugs'. You know that you just do not do it with that director.")

What about his *Shylock*, a role he never wanted to play as he was put off it at school, but having seen a few superb versions recently — including a NIDA one — has he now thoughts on it? How is he going to play that? Is a gang to be very Jewish? Thring refuses to provide any hint. One must just await the production. ■

Hobart's historic

ROYAL



**"The theatre is not a museum piece;
the evolutionary process
of improvement is continuing"**

"How well I remember our first visit to the Theatre Royal, Hobart . . . I think I shall never forget seeing the Theatre for the first time — in the morning when we went to arrange the Stage for our evening performance — I think we both felt it was an ideal theatre — the right size — not from the financial side, alas — but splendid for performance by actors. At night I was thrilled by an intimacy — the perfect acoustics and the feeling of real Theatre — audience and actors performing a Royal Act together. Yes, it's a gem of a Theatre, and an honour to Hobart, and to Tasmania."

So wrote Dame Sybil Thorneike in the foreword to Michael Cox's *History of the Theatre Royal from 1234*. One can romanticise to one's mind Dame Sybil's rich, measured tones, full of enthusiasm and severity for a theatre in which she performed with her husband, Lewis Casson, more than 30 years ago.

Hobart's Theatre Royal is one of the best theatres in Australia for an intimate actor-audience relationship, yet it is basically a Victorian design. As the view of the auditorium shows, the three tiers in the short depth run high above the stage and the mezzanine almost walls off audience for a full house, enclosing the sensitive actor to project his personality and role to each member. In fact, the strongly curved,

small upper tiers provide for the audience seated in them that feeling of encirclement, off and concentration on, the action which is today usually achieved only by thrust stages with their seating rising up and around in a half circle.

Because of its relatively small size and narrow galleries, there are no problems with acoustics at the Royal. The acoustics are quite good for generally listening to drama, and to small opera or musical comedy orchestras, the hard thick plaster on the ceiling and walls assists in reflecting high frequencies, increasing the articulate qualities of speech and lending a quality of brilliance to music which is attractive.

Most actors who have performed in this theatre love, like Dame Sybil, appreciated it as a good theatre. Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh performed there in 1948 with the Old Vic Company, and Olivier supported the citizens of Hobart at that time when the theatre seemed fated to demolition for the widening of road traffic. Nearly 25 years before workenders began to attack the developers for their removal of historic theatres such as Sydney's Royal, and before building workers' greed here soured the continuing life of many historic buildings, including the Sydney and Melbourne Regent Theatres (which can now be counted as "two"), lovers of the Hobart Royal fought off the challenges to the country's most historic theatre. Finally, in 1948 the then Tasmanian Government passed an Act providing for the incorporation of the National Theatre and Fine Arts Society of Tasmania, which in turn was granted

\$12,000 for the purchase of the theatre. Money was then voted to renovate and redecorate the theatre. Work was hurried along early in 1950 when a provincial performance had been arranged for the visit of the then Princess Elizabeth and Duke of Edinburgh. The death of King George VI prevented the visit, but by then the Royal had been redecorated and four boxes had been added to the two upper tiers. Although I personally would prefer the main continuing unobstructed to the proscenium wall, the boxes make the auditorium more Victorian in appearance, following the original design by architect William Pitt for the major alterations of 1841.

What one sees in the foyers and auditorium is not the oldest theatre in Australia. These areas, in design, are pure William Pitt. Although of 19th century, they seem late 19th century, as Pitt unconsciously imitated a large number of columns supporting the tiers, and the decoration is of heavy Victorian style. Ballard's Memorial Theatre auditorium is older: it is a combination of 1875 and 1898 construction. However, parts of the Royal's side and foundation walls and basement rooms date back to the original building finished in 1837 and to the first major reconstruction in 1856-7. The lower portion of the street front was also completed in 1857, the upper part in 1941. The original auditorium and its enlarged successor have entirely disappeared, as, too, have the foyers of each, although from viewing the exterior it can be seen that portions of the old walls have never been replaced in the rebuilding process. Part

ROSS THORNE is Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Sydney. His research into theatre and cinema buildings began in 1961, originally in relation to acoustics, but he has got the better of them. His work has led him into drama, such as arts and cultural facilities in country areas.



Long screen after the rebuilding of 1911 but prior to the addition of boxes adjacent to the proscenium in 1952



Cross section (year 1911) showing a proscenium of rather grand proportions for such a small theatre

Conceptual restoration of the street front of Deane's original theatre of 1810



of the original stage with adjacent aisles also visible, but most of the design of the stage otherwise is late 19th century.

THE BUILDING FROM 1834

In 1846, Peter Degrauw wrote a letter from his Cascade Brewery to the Colonial Secretary attempting to dissuade the government from issuing a theatre licence other than that for his own Theatre Royal in Campbell Street, Hobart. The letter is interesting for the light it throws on the town of Hobart as well as theatrical conditions of the time. It says in part:

"First I have to represent for the information of his Excellency, that in 1834 the monopoly of the Town was much relieved by the arrival of Mrs. Cameron, a very talented actress in Tragedy as well as comedy, and the Town at that time affording no better accommodation for Theatrical purposes than the Freemasons' lodge, at the bottom of Harrington Street (the dimensions of which were only 44 by 37 feet) it was found impossible to change scenery in such a narrow space with due effect — as for the friends of the Dramatic Profession to change their dresses with due regard to decency, the Town people then at Harrington House resolved, to build a commodious theatre by subscription, and the lot was filled up with names to the amount of 3,000 and upwards in one evening."

"A Theatrical Committee was appointed and I was requested to furnish a plan, elevation, and section — which having been approved of by Mr. John Lee Archer (the Honorary Architect) my plan, and tender was accepted, and the structure being half built, only, a disastrous change in the same took place, the subscriptions were not half paid up, I was £2,500 in advance with a mortgage which I was obliged to foreclose, and at the auction sale there was not a single bidder beyond the amount of my claim."

"Suffice it to say that I finished, and furnished it, and it a style greatly surpassing the first intention, and so greatly to my loss."

"For the information of His Excellency (a dimensions are 100 feet long by 50 feet wide, walls 34 feet high — 3 feet thick from foundation to the upper boxes and balcon, and 2 feet from thence to the wall plates (supporting the roof), and so well timbered throughout, and lined with velvet, as to be beyond all question as to its permanent solidity."

"The dressing rooms are commodious, and arranged with a decorative view to the due separation of the sexes, and the interior with a view to the due classification of the several orders of society, and well ventilated throughout."

"With a Theatre such as I have described equal in every respect to most of the

best provincial Theatres in England, I respectfully raise the question, whether any private Theatre is not more than sufficient for our little City of Hobartown."

The first performance had been held in the then-unfinished theatre on 4 March 1837. By 26 March, it had gained the title of "New Theatre Royal", replacing the former venue for theatricals in Hobart, the "Theatre Royal Argyle Rooms".

What was this original theatre like? Degrauw's dimensions provide the shape of the envelope. Various brief contemporary descriptions likened it to a warehouse, stark or barren with the same accuracy having no "intents or effect". It was claimed that the building "did not announce its purpose in construction". A much later photograph shows the upper portion of the old front wall behind the 1857 extension. It shows tops of wide flat piers between which would have been windows. Thus it can be assumed that the facade was typically simple Colonial Georgian of the day. It must be remembered that Degrauw was an engineer and probably not accustomed to building architectural gems, and possibly resorted to passive looks for much of the main design.

Working backwards from architect's working drawings of alterations of 1836, the dimensions of the foyer-saloon, auditorium and stage can be ascertained.



View from the dress circle showing the architectural effect of the foyer-saloon (at the bottom) and the stage.

The auditorium would have been only about 45 feet wide by about 47 feet long to the cantina or act drop line; the stage would have been the same width by 30 feet depth from the act drop. There was no fly-tower, only space sufficient to pull closed borders up out of sight. Scene-changing would have been carried out with flats in grooves after the Georgian/Rapin style. This contrasted to the last decade of the century: an advertisement in Melbourne's *The Courier* (2 March, 1889) seeking companies to visit Hobart quotes the following particulars: "Proscenium opening 31 feet, Height of Grooves 14 feet, Plenty of Stage Scenery, Good Landlight etc."

I have argued previously⁶ that the original auditorium would have been Georgian in style, with the boxes at stage level being entered from the ground-floor saloons and the gallery above being entered from the first-floor saloons; the pit only being slightly lower than the boxes, being entered either through the ground floor saloons or via subterranean passages at the basement, which also contained a tavern.

The first Theatre Royal had a chequerboard corner; it was sold in 1853 after Deane's death. Richard Lewis bought it and major alterations took place in 1856-7. These affected the auditorium and the front of house accommodation from the basement

to the roof. The level of the dress (circle) boxes was raised so the pit (circle) could penetrate beneath, as we are accustomed to seeing in more recent theatres. The new gallery was pushed tightly against the old roof structure, headroom being obtained by putting the ceiling above the roof timbers and tucking an alcove into the roof above the rearward seats. The 300 patrons in the gallery had only one entrance, a three-foot-wide doorway enclosed circular stair to the basement! The pit patrons also entered via the basement, up steps at the rear of the auditorium, however. They had a refreshment bar to slake their thirst. One wonders at the magnitude of the interval crush which would have occurred with the only pit access lobby being five feet wide and space to stand in front of the 10-foot-long bar being only three feet wide! Space and safety standards have certainly changed in the intervening 120 years.

The extended front section of the basement now included three ladies' and two gentlemen's dressing-rooms and one ladies' and one gentlemen's general dressing rooms, all with small fireplaces and no windows. There was also a closet for each sex. There were various internal lavatories, measuring five feet by three feet six inches, probably at best, of the earth-closet type, or at worst, of the commode-pot type. Of course, working ladies

would be pig and basin. The actors had to walk the length of, and beneath the auditorium to arrive at the stage.

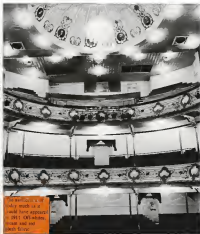
The interior of the auditorium seemed to be quite richly decorated, mostly in white relieved by blue, with mouldings in burnished gold. Fabrics on benches and the rear-napal box were of crimson satin damask, while draperies of the pitmate boxes, dress-alcove and gallery steps were blue-and-gold damask. A down was tucked into the existing roof; it was divided into eight panels and decorated with groups of illustrations of Shakespeare's "Seven Ages" and Shakespeare himself.

In 1882 the stage was extended rearward by fifteen feet and a main sanitary system of seats made to the gallery and pit.

The theatre was sold in 1889 and the new owners initiated more changes, this time to the stage. In 1890, the stage was further extended rearwards and the original roof removed and the present high mansard style roof in corrugated iron constructed to house a fly-tower. The stage was "framed for traps, or 2 quarter traps, grave trap, bridge trap and walk-in." A part of the stage is covered with joists to lift for water stages. There is also a large trap 15 feet by 4 feet for raising scenery — the grid is 60 feet from the stage.⁷ (*The Mercury* Hobart, 19 September 1890). Thus the stage could house any Victorian melodrama with its associated spectacle and the new-style box seats.

In 1913 the last rebuilding took place, this time it was to be the auditorium and front of the house — as it is today. William Pitt's original design working-drawings, however, show that he envisaged a larger theatre. He had proposed cutting off some of the stage-house at the auditorium and extending it the equivalent amount rearwards. In the newly gained space in the auditorium, he had proposed proscenium boxes at stalls and dress-circle level, but the stage remained unaltered and the auditorium was smaller and without the boxes (until 1952) which provide the delightful intimacy of today.

The theatre is not, however, a museum piece, the evolutionary process of improvement is continuing. Last year, it was renovated and new fire-escapes constructed, as, too, were new toilets for the public. The building has been renewed and a new lighting board installed at the prompt corner. For action, removal of the old sub-stage dressing-rooms seems in sight, stage one of a three-storey extension at the rear of the theatre is being constructed. This will finally supply space for loading-dock, workshop, paint-house, new dressing-rooms with showers etc., rehearsal room, administrative offices and, hopefully, a small museum to house relics and ephemera of the Theatre Royal. ■



The Theatre Royal's early mode as a "piggery" could have appeared in 1911. (Columbian, Hobart and Tel. press files)

⁶ See *Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1983: from the place of the first settlement to arrival of cinema*, by Ross Thomas, Toole.

PRESENTING THE PRESENT IN THE PAST

"Experiment usually has been tempered by the need to appeal to mainly conservative audiences . . ."

The Tasmanian Theatre Company is young compared with the Old Tote or the Melbourne Theatre Company, however, it possesses a precious asset: the wisdom of Hubert's Theatre Royal.

When established in 1973, it inherited the Royal, Australia's oldest stage and also a 140-year-old theatrical tradition.

From its beginning in 1833, the Royal's work encompassed the whole spectrum of the theatrical arts, from dances to drama and from operas to opera, with occasional orchestral concerts thrown in.

The variability was what partly The Royal required in a stratified society; the Royal had to cater for all tastes, after all, these were the times of unspecialised theatres and box-office receipts were all important. Producers had to be of good standard or audiences would fall away and they had to be sufficient in number to keep interest in the show alive.

Among those who developed theatre in the 1830s in Hobart, and even before the Royal was built, was Samson Cameron who staged *Kean's Henry, The Scourge, The Married Bachelor, The Revenger* and other productions. Seasons were long — up to five months.

The Samson Cameron company also gave the opening performance at the newly built Theatre Royal on 6 March 1837. The programme listed *Speed the Plough* and the farce *The Spanish Child*.

Mrs Clark and Mr Capper were among the early entrepreneurs who managed the Royal. They took over in 1840 and in the following five years presented musicals, drama including *Charles II, The Merry Monarch, Karl Maria von Weber's Der Freischütz*, and *Andréa*. Mrs Clark recovered heavy financial loss and in 1845 left.

By the time the function of the Royal in Hubert's cultural life had been well defined and a tradition established by which it managed to face often difficult times. In 1889, the Royal nearly came under the auctioneer's hammer, but happily this never came to pass.

In 1889, John Davies, who then was known, added a gallery and a cloister facade. The Davies family has remained connected with the Royal which owes much to them and to the Hubert-Mercery.

In recent times, the Royal was nearly sold to become a warehouse. There was a public outcry. The Royal became the first national theatre in the British Commonwealth incorporated by charter and the National Theatre and Fine Arts Society (NATFAAS) was formed in 1948 to administer it. It was largely through the genius and energy of Mr Bruce Feggetter that this was achieved.

Since then, the Royal has been renovated and re-decorated and heating installed. Today, the Royal is the perfect small theatre perfect in design and proportion and also in location, and it takes a high and honourable place in the cultural life of Tasmania.

It must be said that under NATFAAS the old traditions were carefully maintained and in substance the Royal remained what it had been all along, a stage which had to look after the performing arts in general, although the emphasis occasionally shifted. In the post-war years, for instance,

opera was given a prominent place, and one of the reasons was the arrival of Walter Sussay, a musician and conductor who had learned his craft in Vienna.

Two seasons were given each year with the help of singers from the Marshland and the then ABC Orchestra. Many of the productions paid their way, which in things operatic was something unusual.

Ballet came to the Royal in 1958 with *Roskovinsky*, and light opera in the following year. This, in short, was the tradition the Tasmanian Theatre Company inherited when established in 1973. It also took over Ford, the Royal's resident ghost who appears rarely and only when he is happy. He has made two appearances since the company took over.

The Tasmanian Theatre Company emerged from a re-organisation of the per-

SMALL STATE: BIG PLANS

John Unicomb, director of the Tasmanian Theatre Company, talks to Stan Marks

the different aspects of theatre. For instance, we put on *Patric* and had full houses for our well-rehearsed production of 12 000 people over 10 performances. If we put on an occasional piece like *The Sound of Music* and do it well, we get five times more people, then we look bigger and more people are interested in our efforts. *The Sound of Music* played in over 15,000 people.

Marks: Is it working?

Unicomb: Yes, it is working. It's all a matter of standards. We are trying to have something for everyone — a mixed bag. Our grant has stayed the same this year and so has Theatre in Education's. We get \$118 000 from the Council and \$25 000 from the State Government.

Marks: What are you doing this year?

Unicomb: We are bringing in *Amadeus* *Prokofiev* at the end of May. We don't need standard groups coming in, indeed so, whenever this is, it helps advance theatre here. It is possible we will bring in the *Redoubtable Theatre Company* of New York and the *Polish Mima Theatre*. There may be a couple of commercial ventures we can support. *Now For Other Males* will be on later in the year. We would like more people to be involved in the managerial side. It is difficult to set up too far ahead, this year it's a serious task. But it is hard to see don't weaken. I worry at that no one is really being trained to come up.

Marks: How are you all for theatre in Tasmania?

Unicomb: With the compliance of the Civic Centre, Bassett, there are now reasonably satisfactory drama audiences in three Tasmanian centres. The Theatre Royal, Hobart holds 490 on two levels, the Princess, Launceston, 428 on one level, and the Civic, Burnie, 400 on one level.

Marks: Does this give you great audience potential?

Marks: What decided your move to Hobart?

Unicomb: I first came to Hobart to be manager of the Theatre Royal and then became executive director of the Tasmanian Theatre Company.

Marks: What were you doing before you moved?

Unicomb: Sydney-born, I had extensive experience on the stage and in TV, including with the Philip Street Theatre, *Once upon a Mattress*, various musicals, with the John Alden Shakespeare Company, was resident villain for the Munn Hall and appeared on TV in many features, including *The Dancers*. I have stage management experience, in England from 1953 to 1958, in TV and opera. I returned to Sydney in 1958 and I moved to Tasmania in 1970. After a while, the Australian Council of the Arts wanted some body, more representative locally which had drama, in which it could channel money.

Marks: What has been your policy in Tasmania?

Unicomb: To get people into the theatre, select their appetites and introduce them to

forming artists 1973. Established were the Tasmanian Theatre and Performing Arts Council and the Theatre Royal Board. The Theatre Royal Bill, passed by Parliament in 1973, established the board in income and landhold of the Royal, with the job of managing and maintaining the theatre.

John Unsworth, previously manager of the Royal, was appointed executive director of the TTC. His colleagues to hold the post: Mrs. Fay Thompson, previously secretary of NATPAS, was appointed Theatre Royal manager. The TTC, main user of the Royal, became a resident company. From the start John Unsworth advocated extensions to the old Royal to provide a full workshop department, showers and modern dressing rooms, workshop facilities, adequate loading docks, rehearsal area and staff offices.

He sees the Theatre Royal, with these additions, as being a first-class theatre in structure, a factory producing professionally mounted productions for Hobart and the rest of Tasmania. The first stage of these

additions is now being built with a \$208,000 grant from the Federal Government and \$188,000 from the State Government.

Mr Unsworth also suggested that the Maids, an area under the walls which was originally a tavern, be redevelped as a restaurant.

In its first four years the Tasmanian Theatre Company has extended its welcoming Tasmanian theatrical horizon. The artistic and artistic production is changing into something that recognises Sydney and Melbourne attitudes, and this is being achieved without sacrificing local flavour.

Plays of a more controversial character were introduced into the theatre programme: *Sander and Bender*, *Savages*, *Amadeus*, *Children*, *The Secretaries*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Equus*.

It is remarkable that this process of incorporating late 20th century theatre was accomplished without burning bridges. Indeed, what was found to have had value

in the past was taken over and shaped to meet contemporary standards. This policy did not remain unopposed by the theatre-going public, including the young generation.

That such a policy was and is making great demands on the company is admitted. The company has to be versatile — by necessity must be able to compromise, accept or arrive at standards — and it must be able to make each meet with relatively modest means.

Fortunately, things have become lighter since the "Whiston Spring". The company has adjusted. Today the principals are engaged on a season-to-season basis, when for one production. They usually are well-known Sydney or Melbourne actors who welcome the opportunity to appear in Australia's oldest stage and before audiences who will like to laugh in theatre, but who do not like an over-long diet.

The company has not been afraid of co-operation. It has left the Theatre Royal on three occasions to present theatre-theatrical in Hobart as part of a varied programme that experiment really has been tempered by the need to appeal to mainly conservative audiences.

An example of this artistic policy is the 1977 season which should get the most from the middle-class and middle-aged bands. It should please the young generation and also those with cultivated taste.

Some of those, which has just finished a three-week season, was a quality programme which gave local talent the opportunity to work with Sydney actors. *Conan Doyle* comes next. There will be a school production in July, an amateur performance in September-October, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* will be staged in November and December.

All productions, except *Savages* of March, will have seasons at the Civic Theatre in Sydney and the Princess Theatre in Launceston.

The company also acts as entrepreneur and plans to bring live productions from the Mainland. The first, *The Education of Maximo Gorkin*, opens at the Royal on 24 May. This will be followed by *Tasmanian Paradise* from the Marion Street Theatre, Sydney (28 June-9 July).

The season is more popularly oriented this year to ensure larger audiences and to present a complete theatre programme.

An important branch of the company is Theatre-in-Education. In 1973, Barbara Manning was appointed, and her brief was to introduce a limited programme which would bring young people into the theatre and also to take theatre to schools. Actors not cast in a current production were available for these ventures.

From this venture, beginning Tas. TIE has grown to a permanent company of one, and the team tours Tasmania and sometimes other States.

After five successful seasons and supplementary years as an offshoot of the Tasmanian theatre company Tas. TIE is now preparing to become an autonomous group to be known as the Tasmanian Theatre in Education Company Ltd. ■

Unsworth: Within an hour's drive of Hobart, Launceston and Burnie there is a total population of just on 400,000. This makes it a larger audience to play to than if one was considering just one centre. It also gives a wider potential to the mainland fringe we plan to bring in, and so helps with the exchange of local companies with those across the strait.

Mark: Are you optimistic about theatre in Tasmania?

Unsworth: Yes. I have been having discussions with the APG, Migrant and others about coming over to the island. Why not? They help us to see more theatre. One has to be better here than elsewhere else. That is so our minds add up. They do it we get 2000 people to see each production, and a should be possible to do better than that. We have to get a lot of financial support or the programme will fail.

Mark: What is the CUE project?

Unsworth: A co-operative as a working body for all things theatre. It supplies public relations, technical assistance, acts as an agency and is a general entertainment organisation. It looks at bringing mainland and other groups to Tasmania. I see the role of things, the entrepreneurial one, as really taking our first and programme walks throughout the year.

Mark: How will you use a modernised Theatre Royal?

Unsworth: In many different ways. One example is making it a centre of professional theatre in Australia — really doing things in this direction. A team for Australian plays from the mainland, those written in Tasmania and for trying our hold, are recruited by a variety of Australian writers and actors. It could also become a special type of acting school — training selected people in short-term courses. We should develop the plays, the actors, the set-designers and really be a centre for education, by word and all sorts of variants for Tasmanian and mainland groups. We could join in friendly and be a centre of community and Australian

theatre development, experiments and many things. We could enter as the historical aspects of the island even more into the theatre scene. In our plays, written around aspects of the here, now and in the past, experiment with success, to be with schools more, and broaden our horizons by studying the first, or one of the earliest productions, that was at the Theatre Royal, or going to Launceston and seeing the Launceston Hotel, one of the earliest centres of Australian drama? The Hobart Theatre Society, which celebrated its 50th year in 1976, could also be involved, offering its intimate theatre holding more than 300.

Mark: Do you really think productions like *The Sound of Music* help foster theatre?

Unsworth: Yes. More people are given a theatre experience and then come to see our other productions. One thing when the approach for another and at course, we have to get people to come to the theatre. And *The Sound of Music* is good, highly popular, but at the moment is criticised.

Mark: That you are optimistic about your group's future?

Unsworth: Yes. We have a relatively small population and hard economies to face, but we do have flexibility in our activities. We are helping more young people through our education programme to take an interest in the theatre and to seek more and more production. There is a growing awareness of theatre. Of course, much remains to be done, but I feel we are on the way. After all, in theatre, from audiences to local talent, we only have a small pool to call on.

Mark: Do you ever feel like returning to the mainland theatre permanently?

Unsworth: I have a job here, one that is very taxing, especially in terms of time, but full of challenges — some quite fascinating and different because of local conditions. But, we shall continue. And we will always be pleased to see mainland groups. Very welcome they are.

FRED

a creative film-maker,
an artist, a film nut,
with a wealth
of commercial experience

Fred Schepers' approach to feature film making has been that of the old bull, and nothing has been left on the fence in a rush to either artistic or commercial success.

Working as a producer and director in advertising, documentary and public relations films has not blunted his creativity, just taught him a lot about film and the business of film.

He knows how to visualise, not a camera, pace, sound, read a location, light

or composed and called it "The Film House".

Fred and The Film House developed a business catering mainly to advertising agencies and his commissions, awards and experience in the medium grew.

He continued to run The Film House while drawing on his own experience to write, direct, produce and arrange distribution of *The Devil's Playground*. He also organised the money which included much

of his own. He arranged distribution in the capital class himself and controlled the promotion, ensuring that it wasn't buried in an art house, but took its chance on the main street. In Melbourne it ran at the *Bayton* for eight months.

He took a serious personality, and after the Clark Festival in June it opens at the Columbia theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Schepers says his feature film-making is project based and personal. He plans to



a shot, work with an editor or composer, discipline individual enthusiasm for a scene within the context of a film — all the things you may be taught. But he has also had no orgies or shooting in a budget he has quoted, knew what it takes to form a crew, and still clings on his ideas.

Fred Schepers is not a commercial film maker turned to feature. He is a creative film-maker, an artist, a film nut, with a wealth of commercial experience.

"So many films look as if someone said, let's make a film and then looked around for a story, actors and crew. You need an idea that has to be made into a film."

He spent a young year in a Marxist training college, joined Gordon Advertising in a dog-eat-dog rivalry, was assistant film producer at Paton's to Philip Adams, and became Melbourne manager of *Quintessence*.

At *Quintessence* he wrote and directed documentaries, and after the reversed business failed from the screens was joined by friends to purchase the Melbourne end

The Devil's Playground

Nick Kille
Arthur Dignam
Simon Burke

Written and Directed
by Fred Schepers



SCHNEPP!

work on one film at a time and say it through all stages. "One person has the idea of a film, and one person follows it through. If you demand total personal freedom you are then responsible for standing up for that creation and selling it."

His first film was very personal. He wrote it. It was of his experience. His next film is different. *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* is Fred Schepisi's screenplay of Thomas Kennedy's novel.

"Jimmy Blacksmith is a harder project than *The Devil's Playground*. You have to analyse all the writer's reasons, see the writer's position in the book. You have to find your justification in the book too. It's hard to get a run on as you can when you are writing yourself, when occasionally your thoughts outpace your capacity to write them down. Writing from a novel it's more like waiting."

If *The Devil's Playground* is "not a

novel, always a film, that's no medium", why choose a novel as the base for his film and not just take the outline of the original Jimmy Governor story for his screenplay?

He sees the structure as important, the structure of a novel with a rich tapestry of details building up "not just the man, but the man in his time, the man in his relationship to his environment". And it is a very visual book, Schepisi adds, which does not sit in the occasionally novel culture of, say, *Vera*.

There will be slight changes of attitude between the novel and the film because each has a different point of representation. Schepisi feels that Kennedy would now agree with him that the novel has too little sympathy for the whiten. The film will not see them as victims, more as products of their time.

A novelist who develops his own work of art must feel more gangs when the screenplay is adopted and nurtured by another artist. Tom Kennedy, using the book, is one episode, has obviously grown fond of his character and would like him to have his scene. Schepisi, in writing the screenplay, is worried about distorting treatment of this episode interrupting the cinematic flow.

Schepisi continues the problem with sensitivity, explaining the difference between how novels and films appropriately say what they say and concluded his explanation of this artistic dilemma with, "Anyway, I'm bigger than he is!"

Jimmy Blacksmith is a different film in many ways.

The Devil's Playground had a setting which was largely confined to the college. The action saw the same group of players throughout the film. The crew and cast lived around the college, Fred could "direct at night over a desk" and felt very strongly the personal relationship of his team, as it developed through this growing continuous association.

With *Jimmy Blacksmith* there are many locations. The setting is the bush. There are few main characters but many who are only required for shooting for a day or two.

The logistics of the film are different. There is not the same familiar home base. And the creative ideas are based on Kennedy's.

The film is being planned very carefully. It has to be. The fifteen weeks of shooting will cost \$75,000 a week.

In breaking time losses it is probably fortunate for Schepisi the producer that Schepisi the director loves filming in rain and fog. Another happy combination in the man of art and reality.



NZ report

Mike Nicolaidi

for home-grown talents
the signs are good

Mike Nicolaidi, Jr. is a former dancer of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (1971-8). New Zealand's equivalent of the Australia Council. He is currently theatre critic and performance lobby correspondent for Wellington's Evening Post.

He recently served as cultural adviser to the Task Force on Economic and Social Priorities, whose report 'New Zealand' at the Taittinger Forum has resulted in the Government re-allocating the New Zealand Planning Fund.

Mr Nicolaidi has had a long association with the arts, particularly theatre and film. While London correspondent of the New Zealand Press Association (1963-8), he contributed to theatre critic of *The Spectator*.

Talk: one locally-written play and the brief return here of Kiwi actor-director Jonathan Hardy, on tour from the Melbourne Theatre Company.

Focus: revitalisation of New Zealand theatre's longest running continuing debate: what emphasis should be placed on indigenous work in the programmes of our professional community theatre?

The play is Roger Hall's *Glade Time*, an operatic comedy — with a sting in its tail — about life in the civil service, which showered an unsuspecting Wellington with delight last winter. Such was its appeal on the bourgeoisie heartland that it kept returning for the remainder of the year, including two short, house-full seasons at the capital's 1570-seater Opera House.

Significantly, the theatre is discover-

Glade Time was Wellington's new professional theatre, Cava, established early in 1996 by a group of local business actors. It happens to be the only professional theatre in the country not subsidised by the state — at least, for the moment.

The other signpost, Jonathan Hardy, is a usually, blonde-haired ball of high-powered, home-brew talent. For the last two months he has been at Auckland's Mercury Theatre, the largest, and probably most 'Establishment' of the community theatres.

As well as directing a much-praised production of John Pomeroy's *The Last of the Bushmen*, and appearing in his one-man show, *Gladys' Diary of a Madman*, he has waxed eloquent, and with much

aggression, about what he calls "the need to create an energy surge for indigenous theatre".

In a profile in the influential and widely-read New Zealand weekly magazine *The Listener*, by his hand, saying New Zealand theatre lacked "a sense of excitement... something in the air".

People who labelled "international theatre", he suggested, only made New Zealanders feel more lonely, because they did not understand it.

"If a theatre cannot command an audience, I believe it's the theatre's own fault," he said.

Hardy's balls-and-all attack brought forth some predictable sour comments from some sections of the country's theatrical Establishment.

Lobby: Taittinger



A new Cava





Hardy

"Hardy is forgetting that in a country lacking the ethnic variety of Melbourne, overseas plays are essential for combating insularity and parochialism," wrote Auckland University lecturer critic and sometime actor Colin Blackworth. Somewhat waspishly, he added "It's all very well for Jonathan Hardy to say, 'If you haven't an audience, it's your own fault.' Even if you have, you can't blame for the fault without adequate funds."

In many ways, the debate mirrors the insecurity New Zealand's theatre companies still feel, even though right judiciously spread throughout the country are now receiving financial support from the government through the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. Still rebuffing for the Ministry, and Downstage, in Wellington, him, in both cases, now reached an impasse.

Recently, the substandard theatres formed an Association of Community Theatres (ACT), which is currently in the forefront of protesting for an increase in this year's total Arts Council budget.

While council chairman Harnish Keoh has been stamping the country playing the case for a million-dollar hike in the overall government grant to the arts (from \$1.1 million to \$2.1 million), ACT has set down its particular dilemma in a telegram campaign to all members of parliament. The message of the problem? Callously, the eight theatres need \$200,000 extra this year just to keep functioning.

With the notable exception of Downstage, most of the community theatres, while supporting the principle of

indigenous work, have tended to progress conservatively.

Their eyes have seemed fixed to contemporary overseas plays, even though they know that a London success, either commercial or critical (or both), is a larger safety net than on the other side of the world.

But they are gradually beginning to believe in the obvious growing inclination "new" theatre audiences are developing for home-grown writers.

As well as Curran's recent success with *Glade Time*, Downstage had a long run with Jo Mangan's *Mothers and Fathers* early last year. That "new" comedy is now destined for production by Sydney's Old Tote.

The fundamental answerable, of course, is what comes first, the chicken or the egg — or, in this case, the secure establishment of theatre companies, or a commitment on New Zealand want to produce a truly living, commensurable theatre?

The conundrum has radical permutations.

At the recent annual conference of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, held in Perth region, even Marla Thomas, who is passionately devoted to the cause of indigenous drama in Australia, was unable to give a clear answer.

While saying that without its own corpus of writers a nation cannot claim to have its own theatre, she stressed the need to build up a viable theatre system before the production of new plays was possible.

When, or at what point of establishment, is a theatre system viable? Too much concentration on the "system", without creating that "something in the air" that Hardy speaks of and that sparks real communication between stage and audience, can spell disaster.

However, the success of *Glade Time*, and the leadership and programming courage shown by Downstage over the last five years, appear certain to add momentum to the indigenous drama cause.

Playmarket Inc., an organisation established four years ago to encourage the writing and production of New Zealand plays, recently conducted a survey of forthcoming productions. The signs are good.

Apart from eight planned new productions of *Glade Time* over the next few months (local playwrights Gordon Dryland, Craig Harrison, Robert Lund and, of course, Mangan, are returning close scrutiny).

Upcoming at Downstage, for instance, are month-long seasons of Dryland's new play *For Little Indians*, and Harrison's *Perfect Strangers*. Jackson is described as a timely, satirical comedy about a quartet of flat-dwellers attempting to come to terms with the threatened life-style they've adopted, while the Harrison piece looks compassionately at the problems of racial integration and tolerance.

Good and Never Called Me Mother, by Lund (who is now domiciled in New York



Anthony Taylor

and whose *Well Hung* was given Australian airing by Network Theatre a few years back) will be tackled by Canterbury's Coast Theatre.

These agendas reflect the spirit, if not exactly the frontal impetuosity, of a Jonathan Hardy. Yet it seems we need our Hardy to bang down to earth much that is both debated and promised in our theatres.

Theatre should be neither precious nor prissy, and the injection of a certain rapaciousness, or "bite", can only encourage and lighten the fundamental conviction a most have with its "active", or "active-af", audience.

Significant developments (not previously mentioned) in theatre across the Tasman over the last six months have been:

- the appointment of Anthony Taylor (director of Curran's *Glade Time*) as artistic director of Downstage;

- the appointments of Robert Alderton, executive director, and Jim Mallon, artistic director (a British import) at Mercury;

- a \$6,000 Arts Council fellowship, and honorary doctorate of Honorary (University of Wellington) for New Zealand's "living" and most idiosyncratic, theatrical "institution", Bruce Mason. Mason, who has achieved fame well beyond his shores, has in the past 12 months added two new solo pieces to his repertoire, *Not Christened for Gay Fawcett* and *Counting Blackfaced*. Audiences throughout the country are flocking to him and eating out of his hand.



Dryland



Harrison

International

PLAYING COMEDY STRAIGHT

New Zealand
playwright
**JOSEPH
MUSAPHIA**

writes of the disturbing experience
of acting in his own plays

"I find it difficult to explain that I am trying to write funny tragedies rather than farcical comedies"

Joseph Musaphia was born in London in 1901. He lived in Melbourne between the ages of three and 11, then moved with his family to Christchurch, New Zealand. He has worked as a cartoonist, commercial artist, writer, and owner of a fish-and-chip shop and is at present a writer for the press and the theatre. His plays include *Poor* (1960), *The Grasses* (1971), *Kissme* (1973) and *Chameleon* (1974). He played the lead role in the original production of *Chameleon* and acted in his most recent comedy, *Wentley and Wentley* (to be produced soon, by the Old Time, Sydney), which played to packed houses in New Zealand in some different productions.

Acting in your own plays could be described as mixing egotism with masochism. Egotism in the sense that you think you are the only person capable of interpreting your own wonderful lines. And masochism in the sense that you suffer two sets of nerves on opening nights — those of the actor and those of the writer.

I began acting in and directing my own plays for Stagcraft Theatre — a Wellington amateur group — in the early sixties. I would list some fascinating artistic reasons for doing this, but I must be honest and admit that the main reason I acted in them and directed them was because no one else was interested in doing it. Whereas in those days it was all egotism, nowadays it's balanced with a fair amount of

egotism. I do have the audacity to think that I know what a part and a play I have written are capable of.

Particularly when it comes to comedy. I happen to hold up the highly original theory that good comedy is a serious business. As Charlie Chaplin said, if what you're doing is funny, you don't have to be funny doing it. Unfortunately it can be a dreadfully solitary business trying to convince some actors that trying to acquire a funny line or situation with their own happy business, can produce a laugh to a sympathetic smile and a believable character to a proper recognition.

I find it difficult and embarrassing to explain to actors that I am actually trying to write funny tragedies rather than farcical comedies. I often hid the feeling I was being tolerated as irrelevant as some pseudo-intellectual hack under the impression of two Wellington's answer to Melrose.

In the end I had no choice but to prove to myself that what I write is inherently funny if played directly serious.

To be honest I found there were two reasons why it's difficult not to attempt a bigger laugh on top of the one already existing in a script.

The first reason I suppose applies to every actor. It's because there's no lover, more motivating sound for a performer to shoot from an audience than a roar of laughter. It can be motivating enough to make you forget your place completely.

The second, more personal, reason is related to getting a good laugh while performing in your own play.

The actor-writer can be even more tempted to hold a laugh upon a laugh, and have this line or some topper over one's head and embarrassment. After all, you think, it's my words making it my laugh, and I'll play with it as much as I like if I want to, so there! I managed to suppress

this impulse about two seconds after an audience was totally conditioned by it.

Nowadays, I like to think I have grown — certainly to myself — that playing it straight keeps the character in the play and the play in character, as well as getting the biggest laugh. I've even altered what was coming across in a punch line so that it became something nearer a natural line of dialogue.

This hasn't as yet earned me less of a laugh than was there originally and in some cases it's earned me more. But it's made me feel like a playwright, rather than a copywriter for a stand-up night-club comedy act. By acting in my own comedies, I feel I now know how that a dividing-line there is between what is funny and what is silly.

I'm not claiming comic perfection. I'm simply saying that performing my lines the way I originally wrote them has helped me to carry on striving for that comic perfection.

If I had to sum up my idea of first-rate acting, scripting and acting of comic tragedy — the kind of thing I wish I'd created — it would be in the form of a real-life incident which occurred at Stagcraft years ago. I'd acted in and directed a stage version of a short radio-play to open the renovated theatre we'd created inside the old house rented to Stagcraft by the City Council.

After the nerve-racking opening night, we all went into the green-room to have coffee with the audience, as was Stagcraft's usual habit. A couple approached me — a short bright woman and a very tall and man. She told me my interpretation of a typical Kiwi male in the play was spot on. "New Zealand men really are so weak, witless and easily led," she said, then snatched her gaze up to her husband. "Isn't that right, Henry?" "Yes dear!"

The Australian Ballet The Dance Company (NSW)



"Modern-dance audiences will never grow out of classical ballet fans . . ."

The Australian Ballet and its artistic director, Anne Woodburn, have come in for a lot of criticism lately, much of it negative and unsubstantiated.

The factors surrounding Don Asker's *Monkeys* in a Cage has had some members of the audience ripping up their programmes and demanding their money back at the box-office. There have been outraged letters to the *Sydney Morning Herald* denouncing the return of Sir Robert Helpmann (some of which have gone before the board of directors) and one well-known "personality" of the arts has even again shot his mouth off about the calculated trash and "a waste of time" that *Monkeys in a Cage* seems to be.

It is a known fact that modern-dance audiences will never grow out of classical-ballet fans, the two forms are (to their worlds) apart.

If the reactions to the various works shown in the latest season of the company in Sydney are anything to go by, audiences do not want ballet to say anything about the world we live in. They see it as only a social occasion and a pleasant after-dinner diversion.

Of course, anything with so determined an outlook on life as *Monkeys*, developed in so unapologetically modern a manner is bound to create a furor among the reactionaries. Audiences did and said the same things about Nijinsky's *Parade* and *Mite* of Spring 45 years ago!

The important thing is that the board,

having shown faith in Miss Woodburn as the first prize by asking her to become director, do not go back on their decision now. Also that the directors of the company have sufficient faith in her to pour saw and chain-saw out their severely cleaved preconceptions and see just what she is trying to do to establish an almost mythical performing company.

If the company is content to rebuke the *Merry Widow* again and again, as well as other classics, but stages pieces of free-form, they may keep themselves and the audience happy, and subscriptions upped, but they will soon lose the right to



claim an international reputation of being adventurous and wild. The Australian Ballet and its audience, along with the rest of the world, have to move with the times.

All of which is not to say that the Australian Ballet should gradually do away with the classics and focus entirely only on "modern" works, there are other companies to do that. The company is a classical ballet company, and it has a duty to present the classics in a professional manner.

But, then, what are classics? *Swan Lake* was too daringly innovative for the audiences of its time, now it's a classic. The Ballet Russe caused continual upsets with the works it presented, now some of those are classics. All things change.

Woodburn is a stickler for discipline as well as adventurousness. This may be why some members of the company dislike her. The company has needed a thorough cleaning-up in technique and application for a long time, having been so used to unconsciously wandering through the *Impromptu* of the *Widow*. It takes time and application.

The present season, however, has not made the conservatives very happy and conservers seldom have complained of its lack of interest and innovation.

As far as I'm concerned, such works as *Agon*, *Scenicals* and *Gayle* have been chosen to highlight that strength in technique and ability while *Monkeys* and *Billy the Kid* are there to show evidence that the company has enough ability to tackle material well off the beaten path of conventional ballet. While pieces like *Les Patineurs* and *Sebastian* illustrate the differences of the company from what it was when these works were last performed.

Apart from anything else, it has been a careful selection, made so as not to alienate too many people and therefore keep the company on an even financial level.

In the first programme *Les Patineurs* was dragged up from the past as an effective counter-weight. This aged ballet of Sir Frederick Ashton is looking a little the worse for wear these days. The steps are dated correctly, I suppose, and Kelvin Coe as the Blue Boy has all the speed, assurance and clean line that is so necessary for the "show-off" character of his part. Walter Beards, in the second part, wasn't quite so deft and effortless. The ensemble dancers, by and large, were passable overall, but some of the little choreographic jokes fell flat and in no time was I really conscious that the dancers were in fact impersonating acrobats. Perhaps they should get John Curry in to

help.

Perhaps Loring's latest work, *Billy the Kid*, closed the programme and it illustrated another of the things that we must thank Miss Woodhouse for. She gives dancers with specific abilities encouragement and gets them to star in works that suit them. Eugene Loring saw the qualities of a hitherto unnoticed dancer Danilo Radopovic, wanted him to dance the star part in *Billy the Kid* and Miss Woodhouse concurred. The same goes for Daniel Berch with the star part in *Monkey*.

Billy the Kid is superficially a strange choice for the company. If it was to get a top up to the Australian Ballet School, there are other works that would have stood a lot more about the American spirit than this. Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* for example (if she would have given permission for the piece to be danced by a "mixed" ballet company).

Anyway, *Billy the Kid* is what we got and it was well enough danced. It is gaudy, colourful and dramatic and these qualities have always been the strong points of the company.

A pointed version of the history of this legendary Wild West figure, it has a sustained dramatic thread and plenty of choreographic inventions closely tied to its theme and Aaron Copland's music. There are bow-dances, gun-fights (well-strengthened into the balletic vocabulary) and a real feeling of a frontier community, closely knit, persecuted, hard, yet not without its moments of caring and lyric gentleness.

The main work in this first programme, though, was Don Asher's *Monkeys* in a Cage.

Midwestern-born Asher has been for the past two or so years (he resident choreographer of the Netherlands Dance Theatre, that aggressively modern and pioneering group that was at the top of its form a few years ago with the Glen Tetley-Hans van Manen unit, but which now (I saw it last year while on holiday) seems to be resting on its laurels and lacking any real defining character.

In his rather pretentious programme now, Asher sees that *Monkeys in a Cage* is the Human Primitivist. One can see parallels, of course, the urge for companionship, the dance to claim one's personal territory, the realisation of one's oneness and the natural coexistence of tension when others are introduced into that territory.

Both Asher and his composer, Geoffrey Mudge, claim the influence of the writings of Samuel Beckett and Pinter as well as the paintings of Bosch. The mechanism of these writers is clearly unworkable. The sense of stoniness and dissolution, the drama between individuals and "heterotopias", the hostility when an established community and an order are upset.

David Barclay, in the central role, is riveting. Tiresome in his performance, he makes the drama work because his understanding of it, and its implications are so one with that of the creator.

My only real criticism of this work,

choreographically speaking, is that too much of the ensemble work is blocked and uncoloured, too contrived and messy, unable to convey sufficiently the mechanisms of a community being set up and destroyed. The confusion is extended by the music which offers no assistance or even sympathetic background to the choreographic argument. The set design is capable, but hardly useful or illuminating to the audience.

Apparently, on the strength of the opening-night performance, the creators were not satisfied with some parts of the work and have subsequently set to work on them, so perhaps some of these faults will be cleaned up.

The work is a long-overdue dose of realism for the company, it cannot be their staple diet, of course, but it shows that, given the impetus, they can bring concentration and effort to a new work and firm intention to see the other side of dance. Let us hope that the lesson is learned and will not be lost, either to the company or its subscribers.

In the next issue I will go into greater depth about the other works in the first holiday season for this year, Balanchine's *Serenade*, Ballet's *Schwanen* and the Poppa/*Wagner-Mann* *Der Zigeuner* as well as the beautiful revival of the Corneli/*Petrol* classic *Quatre*.

In searching for the broad line and thematic focus it is easy to overlook the subtleties of the brainstrokes. This thought occurred to me recently when watching a performance of Leigh Warren's *Mirage*, one of the new works in the Dance Company (NSW) season in the Opera House.

To those accused to dance always concerning itself with a clear theme or message, it becomes difficult to get the subtleties of modern dance right. "What is it about?" people always ask. Sometimes emotional messages, relationships or delicately used concepts. Quite often it is concerned with shape, line, form, development and the presence of well-timed bodies performing in a clear, uncluttered space.

The dance critic has one of the hardest jobs in writing his approach. It is something to do oneself into intellectual habits to review a play, it is harder to communicate a purely physical, kinesthetic experience to words. So often one is left with either a dreary catalogue of what happened ("She stuck her leg in the air, he grabbed it and dragged her around the stage") or else a series of very coloured, emotive and purely subjective adjectives, for example, "the well-dark recesses of the bottom of a stagnant pool". And then again, what happens when one is confronted with pieces like Balanchine's *Agon* or *Agonized* where the work is concerned only with shape and form in space and time, usually stripped of emotional connotations? Critiques of these start to read like an essay in advanced physics with talk of "linear flow" and "mathematical processes".

The best one can do is, I suppose, to give a subjective appraisal of what one saw and attempt to leave graphic detail to the im-

agination of the reader. But that of course can misrepresent the choreographer, his dance piece and the whole (if) of his work.

Leigh Warren's *Mirage* (music, Eugene Decary's "Rubicon" baritone) is being about the images of sight, form and emotional relationships. If this concept is true, as I think it is, I fear that Warren had lost sight of his theme half-way through the work, and pushed it out with some extraneous gymnastics. The solo solo in the middle (all of shoulder-stands and other odder arabesques, while being extremely well executed by Andrea Toppe, is inconsequential because it seemingly had nothing to do with what had gone before.

Mirage starts well with three girls slowly promenadeing towards the front of the stage as if walking on foam-rubber. It is dream-like and exploratory. This play-walking is then interrupted by the arrival of the boys, who stand, bend and support the girls in long, languorous falls to the floor. They seem to act as a catalyst, as the past moon frolics, the girls race off in quick, angular turns, and the road is left open for the above-mentioned solo, a quick, snappy segment from the girls, which I found rather pointless, choreographically insufficient and irritating because of constant repetition.

Towards the end the whole team re-enters, there is a slow, and solo for Stephanie St. Claire who seems to have realised that whatever she wanted has turned out to be only a mirage.

I don't think *Mirage* will go down in the annals of Australian dance as a great breakthrough. It is fairly well put together, but still shows the signs of construction. Contractions and expansions and other modern techniques seem to be rarely posted on top of a rather innocuous classicalism, a serious flaw this does nothing to improve the form and image of the work. Warren has also allowed himself to be too strongly dictated to by the music. But still there are moments in this work when one is gripped by tiny flashes of insight, moments of impressive beauty that are all too soon swallowed by a lot of busy, unnecessary so-ing and fro-ing. These moments are the subtle beauties that I mentioned earlier.

This performance was part of the Dance Company's season in the Sydney Opera House, which is silent on extending the dancers and building up new audiences. At Jonathan Taylor told me earlier in the week, the audience for modern dance will not come from the ranks of the aged dancers that comprise a lot of the Australian Ballet's audience, it will come from a younger generation that has not been pre-conditioned to see that dance is all about. This audience is also one that will not stand for empty wholeness or pompous, unthoughtful screaming. It wants something that is moving, vibrant, has wit and intelligence and, moreover, something to say. Modern dance with a "social conscience".

Anna Sakalov certainly has a social conscience and her dance work *Street* poses

the proposition that life is finite, joy ephemeral and personal contact only fleeting. Doretti certainly has impact when first seen, but continual viewings of it leave me indifferent, irritated and highly irritated. I distrust anyone who is content in any direction, and Sokolov as presented in *Doretti* is too unrelentingly passionate to me to trust. She, like Samuel Beckett, has wrong her works out of a literary and philosophical concept with little bearing on life as it is lived. Mr Beckett and Ms Sokolov tell us, "Why bother?" It's all a cruel, commercial joke, anyway."

Sokolov has a right to hold her reason, I just question the morality of her staging of it. Doretti looks spine and soul, and Sokolov is telling us that there are details of the mind, the soul and the imagination as well as those of the earth and the corpse. *Posee*! It is a work that could once have been called "le merveilleux", but which now looks a little "suspense". Free playhops, arms raised to the sky in supplication, floundered losses of sense accompanied with long stretches of music build up the image that we are all minds and adults from each other.

It was a lot more dances and persuasion when performed last year at the Seymour Centre after Sokolov himself had come so much at on the company. But now, with an almost completely new cast and on a larger stage, it has lost its impact. Most of the dancers are young and classically trained - as it would not be totally unfair to say that, perhaps they have not yet got the per-

sonal experience and spiritual armoury to fully conveyingly Sokolov's message to the world.

It was good planning on the part of the Dance Company to have this as the central work, closing with Giselle. Murphy's award-winning, eagerly awaited piece of Australianism, *Glimpses*. Glimpses is clever undoubtedly so, wry, bawdy, satirical, cerebral, pastoral, historical and whimsical. It is a strange work, one of those "history" ballets without a story. Taking his inspiration from the famous Norman Lindsay prints of the myths and myths, and Margaret Sutherland's "sketches", "Hassard Hills", Murphy has created an adult dance performance involving two curiously moral Victorian ladies (Robert Chap and Geoffrey Cuthbert in drag) peering through the bushes on an Australian river and being deliciously affronted by the grotesque caricatures they see.

Through these occasional pairings, or glimpses, we witness a dreamily choreographed scene of group sex, the sublime savagery of three sailors (including me of the male *pas de deux* from *Crische's Raveo and Jodel*) and various erotic pairings going along this particular over bank. There is some marvellous choreographic invention in this work - a group of dancers on the ground with their legs waving in the air becomes the seeds that the two ladies wander through a row built up of dancers clambering up on each other that the ladies enter under (which is wheeled off) later, and a beautiful *pas de*

deux for Murphy and Janet Vernon which reminded me a little too much of the Sator's dance from Balanchine's *Prologue*. So, with the women standing apart on the knees and thighs of her crouching partner, right down to the *Thede Rose* headpiece.

If there is one fault with Murphy's choreography is that thoroughly entertaining work, it is a tendency to use dance as a series of steps to get his dancers out of one pose and into another, dance is as much about transitions as it is about sculptured poses.

However, *Glimpses* is an ideal work to build up audiences, as is the company's *Studio* season in Woolloomooloo. Though I don't think the cramped quarters are entirely worthy of the project, the Woolloomooloo experiment is useful in trying out new choreographers before paying audiences so as to get an idea of their work before making a full-scale production. Murphy's stated intention of using Australian dancers and choreographers, with commissioned works by Australian designers and composers, is a praiseworthy idea, and brings a lot of talent into the company. (One of the greatest delights of this season was the masterly lighting of Bill Akers.) It is a bold venture and one hopes that the prices will be on-going and that the company builds its strength so that soon it will be able to face serious touring and maybe an overseas tour (finance being available) without any qualms.



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Theatre-in-Education this year received the highest grant for TIE from the Australia Council and the 1976 Critics' Award for Tasmania

THEY TELL IT LIKE IT WAS



Lilyan Wherrett (*Mrs. Forthright*) and Ian Long (*Antonio Truffaut*) sing in *I Must Have One Of My Own*

"It was so bloody good it brought tears to my bloody eyes"

At a football club in Whyalla, one of the men thought the backcloth was for a pritty show. What he saw was a theatre-in-education programme that works as popular theatre. He said he stayed to the end because it was so bloody good it brought bloody tears to his eyes. At the Hobart Microcolleagues College, students saw the show that worked for the men in the club in South Australia, with Renaissance art as the backcloth for songs and jokes about our roles in society.

Performances such as these enable Axel Kruse to lecture at modern drama at the University of Sydney. He has written particularly about the plays of Beckett, Pinter, White and Tom Stoppard.

Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education is an exemplary company, a major resource centre for ideas, standards, and scripts for Australian theatre-in-education. The company is the result of the work of Barbara Manning since her appointment in 1973 as youth activities officer to the Tasmanian Theatre Company. After five years, Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education is an independent company at right with a special position in Australian theatre-in-education which earns it a high income from subsidies, including \$70,000 for 1977 from the Australia Council, the highest subsidy paid by the Australia Council for theatre-in-education. This year, over the head of the Tasmanian Theatre Company, the company was given the National Critics Circle

Award for Tasmania for "services to theatre".

Before her appointment in 1973, Barbara Manning worked as a drama specialist in education, as an writer and director, and for some years as a current affairs and art interviewer with ABC radio and television. The company's four main programmes in 1976-7 reflect her view that theatre-in-education is the use of theatre within the whole range of education, and that education is concerned with the development of individuals in social groups, with choices and social expectations as much as facts and academic skills.

Anne Harvey's *FD Be Is On This* for upper secondary and tertiary students is the most widely successful of the four 1976-7 programmes. Anne Harvey works out of Sydney and until the last few years most of her work was as a theatre and tele-

room across in Sydney and Melbourne. She wrote *I'll Be In On That* and *I Must Have One of My Own* with the help of a director's development grant from the Australia Council. After seeing *I'll Be In On That* in Tasmania, John Clark asked her to use it as the basis for the first theatre-in-education course at NIDA, in 1976. A third production by John O'Malley for Children's Artistic Theatre toured Victorian schools for six months last year and was seen by more than 10,000 students. This year a national company of actors, provided by the main state theatre-in-education groups, directed by Anne Harvey, and under the organisation of ATPAA in New South Wales, will take *I'll Be In On That* to an international festival in Wales in July.

I'll Be In On That is about the history of trade unions in Australia, from the Tolpuddle martyrs in the 1830s to the ACTU in the 1950s. The script is written for a company of five. Two characters, Jack and Bill, representing Labour and Capital, agree to "tell it to them like it was". The performance is documentary theatre, much of the speech is quotation from documents and straight facts and figures. The style is realistic and theatrical, with song-and-dance routines and a combination of realism, soap-box oratory, and vaudeville. Jack and Bill are joined in the nineteenth century by a character whose catch-phrase is that he'll be "in on that", because he's a joiner — he'll join anything. He becomes a proxy, a theatre with some pattern written in nineteenth-century dreams, and a 1970s union member. Jack and Bill stage the strikes of the 1890s as a fight in a boxing-ring. When automation comes into the picture they sing the "Automation Song" (it's "the Battle Hymn of the Republic") with a chorus about how "The day has come for judgment and the law will find a hand/What the gentle breeze of automation blows across the land".

In the first half of 1976 the company toured schools in Tasmania with *I'll Be In On That* and John Patterson's *Prometheus*. They also took the trade union programme to the Adelaide Festival. They played at colleges of advanced education and with Albert Hume's *The White Raven* at a memorable last Sunday afternoon in the outdoors amphitheatre at the Festival Centre. In August, Chris Westwood invited the company back to Adelaide to the Space at the Festival Centre for performances of *Prometheus* and the first performances of Anne Harvey's second programme *I Must Have One of My Own*. After Adelaide, they toured schools in Port Augusta and Whyalla and tried out the season show in community theatre. In the second half of the year the company toured Tasmanian schools and performed *I Must Have One of My Own* in community theatre in country towns, in Hobart at the State Centre following a Gap, and then in December for a successful season at the small Coligny Theatre in Hobart.

I'll Be In On That and *I Must Have One of My Own* work as successful com-



Barbara Manning

munity theatre. They combine interest in education and a lot of commitment to well-learned conviction of popular entertainment. The style is part of a world-wide movement that includes plays as different as Tom Stoppard's latest entertainment, *Travesties*, and the Australian Performing Group's *The White Raven* Show. In fact, there is a long tradition of popular theatre that combines ideas and performance that seems to be a game on celebration. The two Tasmanian theatre-in-education programmes replace social issues in an intelligent form of theatre with broad appeal. They maintain without intellectual fussiness, and without the anti-intellectual bias of syntactic abstraction.

In the first half of 1977, the company's two season programmes are *I Must Have One of My Own* and *If He Sings Let He Sings* was developed in workshop. The subject is prison life, firing in, and the idea of difference. In their preparation, the actors focused on the idea that fitting in to a prison-camp is one of the important issues for first and second-year high-school students.

In 1973, the company began with the youth activities officer and two actors involved in the current production at the Theatre Royal. Starting from an outline suggested by Michael Rooley, they devised a half-day structured participation programme about the history of communication.

While the programme was on tour, Barbara Manning paid her way to England and the United States for three months and looked at developments in theatre-in-education. On her return she immediately asked for funding from the Australia Council for a pilot theatre-in-education programme to six actor-teachers with the co-operation of the Tasmanian Education Department. In March 1973, with \$15,000 from the Australia Council, the company made a second start with an actor, Bill Perkins, and a teacher, Louise Sanders (who now runs Free Wheel, a theatre-in-education group in New South Wales). Later in 1973, the Education Department provided a teacher as secondment, Richard Meredith, who is still with the company. The Tasmanian Education Department continues to support the com-

pany with two teacher-actors on secondment, and the work of the company is part of the established range of experience of children in Tasmanian schools. One of the first decisions was that their programmes would be based on social issues directly relevant to children.

The present company includes professional actors, university graduates without teacher training, and trained graduate teachers. Beyond their mass performance in schools and community theatre, their activities include art camps for children and work in special schools and with special groups. In Hobart they help teenage prisoners prepare for dramatic intervention work through participation in structured theatre activities.

Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education is a democratic group, committed to open debate about different ideas in its day-to-day working conditions, opposed to classroom stations and definitions. Four members of the 1977 company are Leiby Whitford, an honorary graduate in social work, Ian Lang, a NIDA graduate with considerable success in professional theatre in Sydney, Martin Chudwick, a graduate in sociology from Sydney, and David O'Connor, a graduate teacher with experience in the professional theatre. In conversation they say their success in theatre depends on communication skills. They seem that they can teach across subject divisions, presenting attractive material based on specialist research. Their approach assumes that theatre-in-education is art-in-education useful because it communicates more than one way (through speech, music and visual arts), and important to children as art, in something the same way as school visits to conventional theatre, art galleries and museums.

The company want better understanding between teachers and themselves, more time for preparation and follow-up work, more use of printed material to support programmes. Discussion turns on finance. The other side of the coin about their income from grants and the Tasmanian Education Department is that the budget is "realistic and minimal". That is, a determined constant effort to keep costs down, and choices in favour of programmes rather than salaries and administrative costs.

But within schools the company combines professional theatre and established educational methods. Theatre-in-education of this kind is a recent international movement. It draws on the widest possibilities for theatre from experimental, radical theories to the more conventional drama that can seem out of touch with what theatre could be about. The growth of interest in Australia comes from people trained to move conventional theatre. School audiences and adult audiences react with real involvement. The whole field of theatre-in-education and community theatre raises the issue that general audiences seem to want theatre that maintains standards in art and entertainment and appeals to wide interest in facts and discussion.

Entrepreneur WILTON MORLEY talks to ROBERT PAGE

"... the best thing that could happen would be a ban on overseas actors"

FLOATING PARACHUTE

Wilton Morley is an Englishman. And the son of a very famous Englishman. Robert Morley, one indeed renowned for portraying the epitome of the British upper-class gent, if rather loveable and bumbling at the same time. Brother Sheridan adds heeds to the British theatre, increases his dryly urbane style as the theatre critic of *Punch*, and appears in numerous television and film productions.

All members of the Morley family are intelligent and, of course, theatrically minded. Yet Robert did not approve of schooling in conventional Eton-Oxford sense. Sheridan did manage to reach the cloisters of that august university, but only by his own efforts and with the background of the native bohemian education imposed on both boys by their parents.

Wilton, with one show under his belt and Benjamin Franklin now under his company's management, is stepping up to becoming one of the most significant forces in commercial management here. His ideas are fresh and challenging, his approach to keep an ear lively to the ground and get there first.

It was father's touring activities which first brought him to these shores four years ago "to see how the other half lives." This came after a two-year stint at the Wyndham Theatre, Sweden, in a manager's position he didn't like because of the real taste of civic theatre. It was good training, though, and having liked what he saw in the Aussies he went around to Miler, Edgely and Williamson's looking for a job.

Williamson's took him on and set him on the road to his own entrepreneurial activities by appointing him tour manager, which over two years took him to most places in Australia. And being the open, hearty and inquisitive chap he is, he made many inroads and contacts in the process.

His feelings about JCW's are mixed: on the one hand he is grateful for the excellent grounding he received in an organization, as it was, unique in the world, but on the other hand he is appalled by the mismanagement which he considers was responsible for the firm's downfall. "They had it coming to them for a long time because it was such an absurdly badly run organization — to the point of financial suicide. At the top were accountants who, to my mind, had little idea about the theatre, the sort of people who saw nothing else and never went near the MTC or the Old Tote. They could have made *Some Time Next Year* a tremendous success by putting the money into the production that I think it needed; another example is *Blackbirds*. With all this kind of thing they could have had first choice if they'd had their fingers out. The good people, like Betty Fender and John Robertson, who did know what was going on, were never really listened to because of the structure of the organization."

When Morley knew that the end was in sight for Williamson's when he went to New York and was offered the rights for *Some Time Next Year*. After taking up the offer he went back to his firm with the proposal "I fished around and got some

money, and said to them, 'Look I've got this play, would you like to do it?' They seemed agreeable, so I asked if they would take a chance, but when they said 'Oh no, we can't have that because we don't allow employees to invest in our productions' 'So I said, 'OK, I'll take it to Leon Brinkhoff if that's how you feel.' So they said 'Perhaps we can bend the rules.' That's how it all started."

Parachute Productions, his company, managed the play in Sydney, with Leon Brinkhoff and Nanette Hayes. When Leon went back to England, Wilton brought out the Melbourne share and put Graeme Blundell in the role. Graeme has become a great friend and important influence on Wilton's thinking. They advise one another and constantly spark ideas off each other.

Having made money with the play, Morley is convinced that audiences in studies to overseas stars are changing rapidly in Australia. "I think that's the way things are going. I'm not crowding, it's as much self-interest as anything. If I promote Australian talent and give Australians roles a glimmer before overseas people, that's more chance of people coming to see — they'll send me plays and so on. Managements using imported actors will find themselves progressively more and more cut off from the actors and the audiences. Part of the thing that went wrong with JCW's was that the actors were always just instruments to be moved from A to B — but it's the actors who create your business, that's the first thing to consider."

We've got people here like Helen Morse, Jack Thompson, Graeme Blundell who do sell tickets. They must be good words and generated properly. Nanette Hayes was last in a play (3 years ago *Sweet Charity*) before this one. Some have and her name doesn't sell tickets, but this year has proved them wrong. Graeme says he doesn't want to be a star, but there must be stars here if theatre is to be Australian. I believe people go to see stars more than plays. People go to Benjamin Franklin because they know Gordon Cliver and go to see *Some Time Next Year* because of Graeme and Nanette."

Morley is quick to stress that his company (he owns a 100 per cent) spends its money in Australia, with very little going out. Not only does he use imported actors as a threat to the talent here, in that audience have been trained to think that only overseas TV stars are worthy of taking lead roles, but also that the country is being used as a money-making machine for outside managements with considerable damage to commercial organizations here. "What they do is make sure that, if a play they've got the rights for is to be staged here, then they must do it and put the money in. Which also means they take the profit out. It's exactly the same as English actors coming. Pretty unfair." The peculiarly weak Equity set-up is largely responsible.

Not in Morley convinced by the argument that at least imported shows provide work here and keep theatres open which

mean, nervous, shifty." They say that before you begin to produce like Paul Elliott to recruit long-term, in the Theatre Royal you wouldn't want anything in the theatre. That sort of thing shouldn't be. A producer properly produced creates need for more. The time has come for us to be heavily Australian in taste. I think the best thing that could happen would be a ban on overseas actors so that people could discover that they like to see their countrymen just as much. It is a fallacy to say that we learn anything from the people who came on the stage. Most of the stuff is dreadful anyway — those awful English comedies!

Apart from Douglas Frank's, though, Morley has no short-term plans for producing local plays. He says rather deliberately that, though he thinks *Some Time Next Year* is a superb and universal play, if he had had an Australian play he would have preferred to do that. He adds that no one has told him anything as yet. Nonetheless, despite having seen some of the better home-grown fare, nothing like his, so far managed to capture his enthusiasm. At present he is captivated by a fine hamlet (or woman, *Deep Fork Sea* and *It*, which had a woman before Christ) at the Marmontal Theatre Club. Again it's a comedy, though on the dark side at the moment he thinks people are more easily pleased by comedy than drama. The play is written by women and will be cast from local actresses (Helen Morse is reading the script) and directed by a woman. I'm thinking of approaching Graham's wife, Kerry — there are a many women dancers here.

Morley's use of an American director for *Some Time Next Year* brought him into contact with Ken Morley of the National. Here he is unimpressed because of the very American character of the play. ("You have to compromise when it's necessary").

Another play on the stocks, again from England, is Willy Russell's *John Paul George Ringo and Bert*, which, if it turns off, is likely to have Graham playing Ringo and Morley from the Skyroads in some shape. Using rock personalities, with their enormous drawing-power, appeals as a way of luring younger people into the theatre. The last ones, he argues, have stage presence, and thus the potential for straight acting. "and the people who manage Morley seem keen on putting some money into theatre, which shows I'm not the only one who thinks the banners can be crossed. *John Paul George* appeals to a whole generation in a way *Sergeant Pepper* couldn't. That was a failure, show based on that music from the album. The Willy Russell play works on the (old second) idea of the Beatles getting back together and discovering that their actions look like them sufficiently to convert the audience at first sight. Morley wants to make use, in part, of the publicity generated which surrounded the group, and recreate the press conferences which brought forth a song competence from the Liverpool four.



Entrepreneur WILTON MORLEY talks to ROBERT PAGE

Again, though, it is likely an outside director would be brought in, though Graham would have been ideal — "no undeniably the first choice for Range." "I'd like someone who knows the worth of English. Perhaps Alan Basser, who directed the original production, but he'd probably come out for only four weeks, where I'd like someone who would be around for the whole run of the production. It's got to be someone I can work closely with, for I'd like to be very involved, though I don't think I'm ready to plunge in and direct it myself."

At the moment, Parashaw can only handle one show at a time. Partly it is a question of management capability and partly because of the finances. *Don't Push Star* and *Fi* will probably be mounted in September, with the Beatles show to go on after that (February?) if the backing is forthcoming. While the company continues to work from production to production, it is too small to represent a real threat to Miller, Broadbent and Edgley. "But if it came to the stage of rivalry that

would be healthy. It has been proven that a theatre opposite one that's packing them in does good business too. So rivalry is good."

Morley's admiration for Broadbent is apparent. "He is a tremendously smart businessman who knows and cares about the theatre. With the new (K.W.) he's certainly got the upper hand in terms of finances, but there would be no real problems there — one can always book those. He told me that, if I wanted the Comedy for September, he would try to find me some dates — I've a lot of time for him."

"I don't know why he's bringing out *Don't Push* during *Don't Push* with Richard O'Sullivan, though. Surely he could find a nice, funny, fast Australian play, perhaps for someone like John Wyatt to do, and push that, or get Jack Thompson back on to the stage. Why bring out O'Sullivan, who has nothing to do with Australia? The thinking behind it seems to be a bit dated. Still, I wouldn't like to say too much about Broadbent, he's too powerful! I hope he makes money from *Clonus Lew* — certainly a lot of money has gone into it."

Morley is also looking in to the possibility of linking up with subsidised theatre in something of the way it has turned out, though in that case without plagiarising, with *Stagnant Frankie*. The big stumbling-block is working out the finances, but if that could be overcome, there seems little reason why a subsidised

theatre should not try out a worthwhile new play with a commercial management working in the wings to cover it if the response were sufficient. The use of the resources and of the expertise of each in this way could provide a new possibility for promoting the local product. "I'm already interested in doing things with Graham's company, Hoople — and hope to take up *Don't Push* if it is successful. Of course, such an arrangement would be tremendous from my point of view — to take over a complete package, but I don't know at this stage how far they see his National would go in just ventures like this."

Parashaw may operate softly, softly to catch the audience monkey at the moment, but the family is still there to help Wilton move quickly. Sheridan keeps him posted with reviews and advice from London. "Then I react instinctively — often without having read the play — and place an astronomical call and offer say 500 pounds with 10 per cent royalties. They give a year's option, then if you do the play, the initial money covers all the royalties — if not, you haven't lost too much." Unsurprisingly, it was his father who suggested the name Parashaw ("one leap — and a rope not open"), and in one sense Robert is always in reserve to back any fall. "If I needed some quick money, I could always bring Dad out with his cinema show — but I don't want to have to." At present Wilton's money goes happily on his own.

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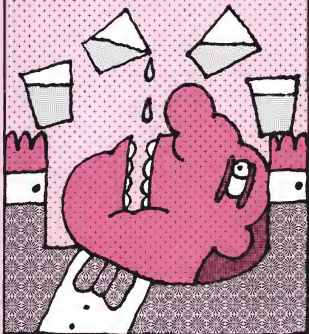
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Playscript

THE FALL GUY

Linda Aronson



THE DRAMA BEHIND THE PLAY

Linda Aronson's life in London in 1968. Educated at Yale (where she studied English Literature at the New Haven campus of Yale and St. Hilda's College, Oxford), she is currently working on a PhD in Sydney University. She began writing as a child but has concentrated on play-writing only since moving to Australia in 1975. *The Fall Guy* is the first of her plays to be produced professionally. Her first Australian play, *Clown down* — about a family that runs a shady party-in-the-dai amusement hall — has to have been produced at both the South Pacific and The Sydney Lyttelton. Her Australian play *Love's my Garden* has an interim edition at the Australian Theatre Festival. Linda Aronson has also published poetry and screenplays (screened for ABC radio and Sydney's New Theatre).



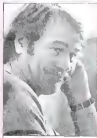
Maggie Dinklage as Maggie, Stephen O'Grady as Sam

The idea of writing *The Fall Guy* came to me when I first saw the September 5 colour York theatre. The stage area suggested vaudeville; in particular, a comedy duo. I finished the first draft in November 1980 and the second draft eight months later. That version had a major overhaul on the gay dance action and the odd bits here and there reprocessed the finished script. The plot remained virtually unchanged, although its presentation was different. Gordon, for example, neither met the boys nor attended the dance. The first draft was really two plays: *Jack* and *London* and *Maggie* and *Love*. The problem lay in combining the two, about improving structure, pace and the subtextation.

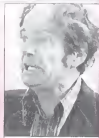
The rewriting period was a crucial one. With hindsight, the problem was to choose between the complex plotting and characterisation of full naturalism and something more symbolic — based in naturalism but employing archetypes to pursue the comedy duo as a metaphor of partnership. It was at this time that I first remembered *The Fannyman*. Until then I hadn't known the play at all.

It was worrying, partly because I'd thought *Fall Guy* was original (and it was depressing to realise to me what could be done with the idea) but largely because I was frightened of being influenced. The boys were well founded. I began to write a complicated naturalistic play, then, realising something was wrong, grounded to a halt in total confusion. Months later, and still no further, I concluded that what must be interesting was not so much the story or characters, but rather the nature of partnership. Since a comedy duo denies us humour largely from the joke of two bickering but inseparable friends, why not expose the truth behind that joke through the joke itself? That is, create some bickering couple and pour the resemblance to vaudeville comedy. And that — although with no such clear idea of it — I tried to do.

The gay dance session was the play's problem area. It was through five sessions in the first draft the scene was simply typed and heard during the blackbox Mark II rehearsal. The final version but with no script, more dialogue, and Maggie



Thomas Dromer as Gordon



Norman Ross as Jack

and Gordon bawling while Jack performed. The third version had Jack performing his act during the theatre session. The fight occurred later, outside the dance hall. The final version in the fourth draft moves about half the dialogue, including a part where Maggie breaks down.

The problems were considerable because a great deal regarding plot and characterisation had to be explained credibly without loss of pace — in fact in something like three minutes. My main worry was that the dance episode might duplicate the last scene before the attempts with tape-recordings and "backstage effects".

The turning-point came when the cast and director suggested that the gay dance audience — which, until the fourth draft, satiated Jack off the stage — should respond favourably towards him. After an

hours of debate and several stiff drinks, I concluded they were right. It was more credible, and made Jack's humiliation more powerful, since triumph preceded the act of a scene was also suggested this afternoon — tossed in casually, almost dispassionately at the eleventh hour. I'd never heard of a scene. I loved the idea because, as well as making possible the "backstage effect" I'd wanted but hadn't known how to stage, it added a strong visual element and the opportunity for visual symbolism.

Needless to say, I was more than pleased with the production. My thanks to all concerned.

Next issue: Act 1 of *The Fall Guy* and *The Fall Guy Cookbook*, by Mick Rodger.

of Jack's grandfather were. In the last part of the song Jack and Gordon dance to the doorway and collect hand-held microphones from two people concealed behind the flat. There may be a copy-right or a copyright issue — as long as the two have kept their faces hidden.

Jack: Thank you, thank you, good evening (Gordon is whispering affectionally at the audience.) That's right, just keep on singing. Thank you (Whispering Gordon.) Jesus Christ, the original Gay Gordon? Will you stop that?

Gordon (Gay): Jesus!
Jack (to audience): You might think it's funny, mate. You wanna try being with it (Gordon is eyeing him up.) Making y'weep. Well are you enjoying yourselves? That's the main thing. You enjoying yourself, dear? Are you? Where you from? Eh? Wellington? Don't worry, you'll get over it. Anyone can learn Wellington. I knew a girl from Wellington once. She used to top-dress with her right leg, do the caisson with her left leg, and between the two she made her living. True? Na, it's all this pervasive society business. Peeffness, windchill, wind-sweeping. Tried to sweep my wife once. Best offer I got was two children and a broken law-sawyer.

(For the Wellington woman in the audience.) Aw, she's offended now. Dumbo why — an old knee when goes on in Wellington. Are you? Na, but things are different these days. Go up King's Cross, there's ice-shops, massage parlours, dory lifts. What sorts society's this? I ask you. I mean, why should we have to travel all that way to get it? Disgraceful! Have we got anyone from interstate? Anyone travelling interstate? Where from? Queensland? Roman country? You know, first time I went to Queensland I saw a fellow walking down the street with a banana in his ear. For dumbo? I said, "Ay you, y'know y'got a banana in your ear?" I did. "Speak up," he says, "Can't hear y' — got a banana in my ear." Oh yes, you got it, didn't you dear? Oh yes. Got her all set with a red.

(To another member of the audience.) What, I said, was? When d'y' think you see? The Opera House? Na, but seriously, it's a violent society these days. Can't run with the streets — no caution. It's true? (Whispering Gordon.) Ask him — he stood so long at the end of my street, he got a grant from the National Trust. Dido? You, eh? Eh? Na, it's a shame. Country's going to the dogs. Falls poofers, wags, cripples. (Indicating the paralytic man.) Spouse you'll have married that. (Sighs.) Ah well, that's life. Can't brood about it. We must take what the good Lord sends. But but... (Pause.) I'd give me right arm to have a drink.

(To a woman in the audience.) Oh, had you married there, didn't I? Eh? Na, but I don't believe in mollycoddling the sick. It's about time the lame dogs learnt to stand on their own feet.

(Whispering Gordon.) I mean, if he can stand on his own feet, anyone can. Aw, he's dumbly know. Dumbo? Tried to tell his brain for internet once. Didn't you, eh?

They give him an IQ test, reckoned he'd been dead for four years. Na, it's embarrassing. Lives in a world of his own, they all do. Take the other day. Y'know what he does for a living? Tell me what y' do for a living.

Gordon (Gay): housework.
Jack: Right. Now what you and me know is that barbers don't only add haircuts (Taps his nose significantly.) Oh, she knows — look at her — you know what I'm talking about don't y'? Yes? I mean when I was seven I had the shortest hair cut in Sydney. I did? Think about it? Think about it? But he doesn't understand that, see. What happens? There he is, leaning round with his hair-cream and hair-spray — me, you tell 'em.

Gordon: Well, a man came in and asked me if I kept a Gossamer.

Jack: And what did you say?
Gordon: Supposedly or hard-to-hold?

Jack: Na, don't laugh, it's pathetic. Na, when you think about it. Married once, would y' believe? Wasn't y'? Great, heggie?

I said, she had her good points (Gestures to indicate great beauty) — two of 'em! Na, but you shouldn't laugh. You shouldn't. (Indicating a woman in the audience.) Ah, she's off? Look at her, she's off? No chance, same ol' 'em. Na, seriously, that is a sad story. Tragic story. He bumped her off. Dido's y'? You. Still-fucked her — stuck a yellow down her throat while she was asleep. Aw, sorry? He doesn't, but, don't y'? He reckons she was dreaming about eating marshmallows. It's true? My mate? The stupid! He loved her. I tell me what poked Gordon? I buried her in the back yard.
Jack: You right you buried her? (To audience.) Aw, he buried her, all right. Buried her with her hair sticking right up out of the pants!

Gordon: Well, I had to have somewhere to park my bike!

(Indicating him to "Side by Side" Gordon drops the microphone, and both go into a song-and-dance routine, singing "Side by Side".)

(Singing.) Thank you? Thank you?
(After run out through the doorway, purely lifting off the flag and the RSL emblem as they go. Silence.)

SCENE 1

Jack & Bar
(Arrives. While the car is being changed Jack and Gordon are heard offstage. With bottles tapping, singing of keys, musical notes interspersed with Jack's two renditions of "Side by Side". Lights. Jack and Gordon enter, and in evening wear but appear bemused and somewhat at the wane for what Jack is carrying a whisky bottle. Gordon is subdued and ill-at-ease. Jack gets two glasses from the cabinet.)

Jack: Well, come on, mate. What y' frightened off? Landmass? (Pours out two

whisker, offers one to Gordon.) Here Gordon. No thanks. Mind if I use your phone?

Jack (pours, stares at Gordon):
Gordon: What's the matter with you?

Gordon: Nothing. Look, can I use the phone?

Jack: Help yourself. (Gordon starts dialling a number.) Why y' phoning — Myra?

Gordon: Yeah (Pause).

Jack (annoyed): Jesus, that old trick got plastered didn't it?

Gordon: Hello? Myra? Look Dido! I'm at Jack's. I know. Sorry, here, I couldn't get away. Yeah. No, I haven't yet. All right. Yeah, soon as I can. Bye.

(Gordon replaces the receiver. Uncomfortable pause.)

Jack: You'll give yourself a hernia if you don't stop laughing.

Gordon: Ah.
Jack: Well, what's the matter with everyone? First it's Barney, now it's you. I. This is supposed to be a celebration.

Twenty-eight years together? Me, you and Barney. Twenty-eight years today — and you're more worried about bloody Myra. Gordon. She is my wife, Jack.

Jack: No! I thought she was your Great Aunt Barry.

Gordon: Look, it's two o'clock in the morning. I said I'd be home as soon. What's wrong with phoning?

Jack: Nothing! Nothing! Why don't you get a two-way radio? (Mimes.) "Gordon to Myra, Gordon to Myra, request permission to pee." (Pause.)

Gordon: I'll go home if you want.

Jack: Suddenly? (Pause.) Thought you might be a bit more interested, that's all. (Pause.) We had this planned for months — you, me, Barney, beta gang, lot of a ring-song.

Gordon (sweary): You had it planned for months, we didn't. You know Barney can't drink.

Jack: Here we go. Barney's bloody useless.

Gordon: Barney is a sick man, Jack. You can laugh if you don't watch the group you'll end up like him, please!

Jack: Look, mate, as far as I'm concerned Barney could sit there drinking bloody beer safe so long as he'd turned up. It isn't making much for him to save up. (Pause.) I haven't seen him for weeks. That's not ages! More like a bloody moon ages!

Gordon (sweary): He must have been crook.

Jack: You right? Topped out his wallet and broke a leg. (Pause. Jack swears.) Gordon and himself? "Well, Jack mate, I've enjoyed these twenty-eight years to gether." "Aw, Gordon. "Na, Jack, here some of my life." "Well, I enjoyed them as well, Gordon. I hope we have many more years together." "I'll drink to that Jack — says I haven't got a drink." "That's all right, Gordon, we all know you're a bit pissed pater."

Gordon: Stave it.

Jack: Well, for Christ's sake say something witty!

(Panic)

Gordon (sarcastically, carefully) lacking conversationally. It's been good working with you, Jack.

Instead of the anticipated comic relief, there is silence. Jack is dead. He shares in Gordon for a moment.

Jack: Go home, Gordon.

Gordon: I'm sorry, mate.

Jack: Go on, go home.

Gordon: Jack.

Jack: Just let me know about that club date will you? (Panic)

Gordon: That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Barney!

Jack: Ah. Barney got anything else lined up?

Gordon: No, nothing.

Jack: Nothing? Whaddya mean "nothing"? That club was the only thing between now and January! What's the stupid bastard doing with himself?

Gordon: Jack, I got him to cancel the lot.

Panic: Jack is unbelievable!

Jack (shouting with controlled fury): All right, cancel it, unless the game! Well, come on!

Gordon (with difficulty): It's about the act. I'm not happy with it, Jack. It's just... It's cheap, man. I mean, all the business about me being a poofter. I feel like a ventriloquist's dummy up there. I'm a comic, same as you. Look, I don't feel like it's a double act any more. Either we change it, or...

Panic: Jack really has had a change!

Jack: So we're on to that again, are we? We're on to that. What's got lined up for yourself this time? More out-right commercial?

Gordon (attempting to explain calmly): I haven't lined up anything. That's what we're here to talk about.

Jack: Oh, is it? Bit late in the piece for talking.

Gordon: I kept trying, you wouldn't listen.

Jack: So you rig this up? To point Barney's in it as well, is he? Is he? (Gordon turns away) Ah, that's better. That's better. Twenty-eight years? You really thought your marriage, don't you.

Gordon: Jack.

Jack: Don't you bloody Jack me. (Panic)

Gordon: It was the only way. I kept trying suggest changes, you wouldn't have it. (Panic)

Jack: Suppose Luke. Myra's got her finger in the pot. Ah yeah. Gordon's like her big brother sitting like a pool, eh?

Gordon: It's got nothing to do with Myra. I made the decision.

Jack: You wanna remedy a perfectly good act, and it's something to do with Myra?

Gordon: It's a lousy act. Our two spots are getting shorter and shorter — Barney spends more time on us than on the rest of them put together.

Jack: Ah yeah, good old Barney! Where was bloody Barney ten years ago when we coulda got that TV contract, eh? Eh? Didn't see him begging his guts out then, did we?

Gordon: We'd nevera got that job. Don't blame Barney. (Panic) What are we gonna do?

Jack: Don't ask me. You made the decision. We're finished. (Panic)

Gordon: All I want to do is change it a bit.

Jack: Aw, grow up! You can't change an act like that! We go on on the stage, they expect you to fill the pooler! That's how they know us! That's our stage! You change that, boy, and you're done.

Gordon: But I won't change the pooler! Not at the beginning.

Jack: The beginning was twenty-eight years ago? They don't remember that! Jesus Christ!

Gordon (aggressively): Well, I'm sorry, mate, but it's not I changed it, go.

Jack: Well, go — and good bloody night-dance. (Panic) You know, I can't understand you. I work for years to build up an act, years, and all the time you're pick, pick, pick, unenthusiastic, picking away, destroying everything...

Gordon: That's the point, Jack. Is it your act?

Jack (vehemently): Yeah, well, of course! I'm not the one to blame, mate. I'm not the one who walks out every time the going gets rough.

Gordon: Twice I've done that.

Jack: My coach (Sarcastically) Gordon, my mate, my partner. Well, if I point I should thank you for giving me a better warning, shouldn't I? Makes a change from last time.

Gordon: Look, after what you did.

Jack: What did I do, eh? Eh? Told Myra a few home truths, you shoulda told her yourself! Jesus says, the Bible!

Gordon: All right, act it out.

Jack: Who couldn't take it, could she? First her husband spending all his time with Jack, then her kids spending Jack on her house — in front of all her new friends. Oh no, wouldn't do would it?

Gordon: Jack, the kids asked her to tell you. They were growing up. They wanted their own secret parties. They loved you there when they were babies doing all the copping tricks, but...

Jack: Danny was twelve years old! Twelve years of age!

Gordon: Kids are funny at that age. They wanna be grown up. They don't want their parents. I coulda hanging around. They want their own friends.

Jack: Look, if he'd felt like that he wouldn't tell me himself! Danny said me were mates, always were. That kid worshipped me.

Gordon: He didn't wanna hear your feelings.

Jack (contemptuously): Hurt my feelings.

Gordon (angrily): Well, what did you expect him to say? "Don't come to my party, Uncle Jack, 'cos all the kids at school laugh at me when you come to school, and try to juggle and can't, and besides the way you swing your head when about makes me feel sick." (Jack is hurt. Panic) Anyhow, that's all in the past.

Jack: Except for one small thing. You walked out on me then, and you're gonna walk out on me now.

Gordon: I'm not walking out on you.

Jack: What are you doing then?

Gordon: I'm asking you to change the act, that's all. Just give me a bit of it. Give me something to do up there.

Jack: And if I don't, you walk out, do you? (Gordon looks at her for a while, you gonna do, eh? What you got lined up? You've got something, or else you'd nevera brought it up, would you?

Gordon (sarcastically): I haven't got anything.

Jack: Oh yes you have. I've known you for too long, mate. You can't tell me, sunny. What's the got lined up for you, eh? Eh? What a old Myra lined up for her love-bug, eh?

Gordon: Nothing.

Jack: The brother-in-law! The brother-in-law's firm, that's it! She's got you on there, hasn't she?

Gordon: I've got responsibilities, Jack.

Jack: Don't tell me! Christ don't look at the rich brother-in-law's firm!

Gordon: Well, I'll earn a damn sight more from that than from being with you, won't I? And Barney'll do what he can! (Panic) I think you only... Well, she's really done you proud this time. Even got bloody Barney on side. (Panic: Laughing sarcastically) You know what? You know, it wouldn't matter if it was you — if it was really you doing it, if you came out in the open.

Gordon: I've got responsibilities, Jack. It's all right for you, I've got a wife and family to think of.

Jack (gloriously): He won't! I've got me to think of! Haven't I got any responsibility to me? Who'd I think I am, eh? Eh? Twenty-eight years' mate, that's what I am. I've had a life of trials!

Gordon: It's not a matter of loyalty...

Jack: Well, it is as far as I'm concerned. (Panic: They snarled each other) You know what today is? Do you? Do you?

Gordon (sarcastically): I know.

During the following speech, Jack reaches to the microphone, removes a 28 year note from his sleeve and sets it on the microphone.

Gordon (in a frenzy): This is what today is. The anniversary of this Twenty-eight years' mate. Before Barney, before Myra — you and me, two days after we met.

Gordon: Don't put it on.



You're there to entertain and God help you if you don't. Because an audience is a thing without money. They know no money.

Hughes (singing to the man of 14) *You know Sam? I* If you know money like I know money.

Sam (laughing) Hughes, don't you think Jack (laughing) with a great jawline like Y'know? You're pulling my leg?

Hughes and Jack (singing) If you know money like I know money.

Sam Hughes, I think we'd better be going.

Hughes and Jack (singing) *Off you laughers* Jack. That's like the case — hear the one about the year with their daughters. Faith Hope and Charity? He ended up on an instant charge, 'cos Charity began at home!

Sam Hughes, I think we'd better be going.

Jack Ah, you're not going, are y'? Have a beer before you go, my boy!

Hughes Ah thanks Jack.

Sam Sorry, but —

Jack Sorry! Won't be a minute. I'll get old Jack out here. You'll like old Jack.

Jack (singing) Hughes wouldn't he go three shakes his head in a minute of emotion and courage.

Hughes Where do they come from?

Sam If you let the two into another fight.

Why did you have to give him all that crap about your mother?

Hughes (singing out the microphone) Oh yes, let's see, what did he write? (Reads) "To Gladys. Keep your sunny side up."

Jack (The concerned bandit) Harvey — God, that'd go down well with the old girl!

(With a high-pitched upper-class accent) "Hughes darling, just what is a sunny side?"

Sam Hughes, he's pathetic. Why don't you leave him alone?

Hughes Leave him alone? What have I done to him? Pretended my mother was his mother. Go? So what? Where's the harm?

Just teased him, go, that's all. Here hardly likely to meet her and if he did, she's so vague she'd probably think she was his gravestone.

Sam Let's go before he comes back, shall we?

Hughes Why?

Sam Why? — Give me one good reason for staying!

Hughes (a) He's buying a drink, (b) he means me.

Sam And (c) because you want to annoy me.

Hughes (singing to the man of 14) *Cheer's* 's Parthenon, you're breaking my heart, you're shaking my one Solomon, baby.

Sam What have I done, Hughes? Why are you acting like this? Just tell me what I've done. Well you? (Hughes groans) I've got a right to know!

Hughes Shut up, Sam, please.

Sam Well, what's the matter with you?

Hughes (exasperated) Ah. Hong Kong doing? (Picks) Sorry me the under-graduate psychology, will you? Just leave me alone — stop nagging me!

Sam One minute I'm not paying any

attention to you, the next I'm supposed to be nagging you. I don't know what to do if you complain, if you talked it out.

Hughes If we talked it out. Yes Well, I'm afraid that was one of Sam's worst little tricks — all sitting around debating over our boring nervous.

Sam I didn't think there was anything boring about Rex threatening to kill himself!

Hughes Well, I did. Anyone who's failed as many times as he has ought to have the common decency to keep it to themselves. (Picks)

Sam Oh God, you're sick!

Hughes (laughing) No Sam, you are, you and all the rest of them. Rex's life is a total misery to him. He's old, boring, ugly, considered and poor. He has nothing and he knows it and he wants out. Now, that being the case, I don't see how your attempts at provoking him, all the back-burns — midnight raids, frisking him for Woburn, dragging him out of the pub even when he's sleeping to be left there — I can't see how that's anything more than a mocked sort of ego-trip, and if anyone deserves any comfort from it, it's certainly not Rex.

Sam And how long have you been polishing up that little speech?

Sam There were at least other Jack in hand of stage.

Jack (yell) Ah, come on! Well all right, when it's finished that! Ah, y'don't want watch that, do y'? Getting into your second childhood now, that's what's wrong with you. (Approach at the doorway carrying a jug of beer) Solly old bigger want to watch *Sweeney* *Sweeney* (Over his shoulder) Change your mind and come in here! All right, please yourself. (Goes to the table, shaking his head) That's all look for you. You know, you'd never make it, looking at him now, but he used to be one of the best singers in the business. Here.

Jack Just the jug on the table, art down.

Angie and Sam each take a glass.

Sam Thank you.

Hughes Ah, thanks.

Jack Yeah. Gave to bloody pears. Used to sing all the old stuff, y'know — with that waddy sorta voice they all used to love. Heard sing you open, the lot. Course, all that went into fashion. Old Jack went out with it. Mind you, he once was going a bit even then. Well, he was all right — with had a lotta money. Remember the stuffing out of him, but. Yeah. Got enough beer into him and he'll all sing for you — "Banks as" "Banks as" "Banks as", that sorta stuff — is a cracked old voice, Adam's apple sticking away like a soggy old chook, for all the world like a soggy old chook. Poor old bastard. Y'know whether to laugh or cry.

Sam And he just sits in there all day, does he?

Jack Yeah. But there again, it's like I was telling —

Hughes Hughes. Hughes and Sam.

Jack Yeah, it's like I was telling Hughes a while back, he couldn't adapt. He couldn't change with the times, changed his song, but he couldn't. Now me, I'm thinking of

the time about my work — polishing it up here, rounding it off there. That's professional. You see, when you're a comedian, it's not a job, it's your life. Never let up. Never let anything put you (Laughs) What's you here a business?

Sam No! I'm a student.

Jack Ah yeah. What y'studying?

Sam Psychology, mainly.

Jack Always wanted to be a vet myself. Lotta money in that. Course you need strong nerves. Taken a lotta more to work you hard up one day, I reckon!

Jack Starts drinking.

Hughes Taken even more to stick it up a ball's bum.

Jack (singing) *and-swellow* (laughs) coughing. *Sam* (singing) and-swellow. *Sam* (singing) and-swellow.

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Plays. Agree, only.

Hughie (*delighted*). Not Sam Rogers.
Jack. Yeah. Sure. Bloody Rogers. Here on the TV so much you'd think he was the bloody Prime Minister! What d'you think about this, Mr Rogers? what d'you think about that, Mr Rogers? I wouldn't mind but there's fucking loads watching that.

Hughie. I turn your stomach.

Jack. My, isn't it? Playing Asian rules — and then wonder why we lost the Olympics game? How come what Jack calls him?

Hughie. I dunno.

Jack. Have a guess. go on, have a guess.

Hughie. I give up.

Jack. Point on home?

Maggie and **Jack** near *with laughter*.

Sean. Let's go, Hughie.

Jack. Ah, you going yet?

Hughie. No? (To Sean) Sit down — you haven't even finished your drink!

Jack. Yeah, but Jack might be lying in the middle but he's not past it yet. (Getting up.)

Tell y'what, I'll try and get him out here. (Goes to the door.) *As Jack* Jack must! (Plays an *if* drum.) Come out here, willy? (Plays again then runs with a gesture of impatience. *Offstage*.) You don't wanna watch that?

Hughie *hears some laughter*.

Hughie. Poof in busts? Oh God I can't wait to see Sam's face. (Pompous.) I'm, sorry of politicians designed to increase public awareness of the movement for homosexual rights, 'Poof in Busts' Suggest!

Sean. That's a lovely bit of bloody logic.

Hughie (*amused*). Oh stop long to self-aggrandise. What d'you expect? Sam goes on TV and the next day looks like Jack dropped out of a gaily conscience.

Sean. No. I don't expect that. On the other hand, I don't expect to spend my spare time having that sort of bigotry written down up there. Why d'you get into situations like that? What is it? Some sort of occupation?

Hughie (*amused*). You are the occupier. I fear the facts.

Sean. You encouraged him?

Hughie (*smiles only*). What? Me?

Sean. Very dull!

Hughie. Temper, temper!

Sean. It's not nice to another fight.

Hughie (*amused*). Relax! Look, he's not attacking me, that's all.

Sean. Oh, really? Why don't you take his photo? A chance specimen of local colour? He's no fool, Hughie. He's going to make you re-examine him up.

Hughie. Oh stop talking. What harm am I doing? I'm just passing the time of day with him. Anyway, you must admit he's quite a character.

Sean. If you like that sort of thing.

Hughie. Well, at first he's got a bit of life. Come on, what else have you got to do?

Sean. For a man, you're supposed to be helping him with those poems.

Hughie. What poems?

Sean (*impatient*). Unless poems for the dance. The gay dance on Saturday. You promised.

Hughie. Ah you're kidding. When?

Sean. It's a pretty last week. You offered me a quittance for half a bottle of red.

Hughie. Christ, what else did I offer? Oh look, he can't possibly keep me in that!

Sean. You would've got me out of it.

Hughie. Well, I'm not going. Kicks off his head — some peace and strange beating given Christ!

Sean. You promised, Hughie.

Hughie. Not!

Jack reappears at the doorway *comes over to the table*.

Jack. No, he won't budge.

Hughie. Still watching *Sammy Street*?

Jack. Yeah, only a bit bigger. Christ, watch my cuth. I hope I go before I get big that.

Hughie. Well, he's hope that won't be for a long time yet, I hear.

Jack. Yeah. I'll drink to that. (Drinks.)

Hughie. What do you do for a living?

Hughie. I don't. I'm redundant and unemployed and unemployed.

Jack. What's your trade?

Hughie. Well, I'm a what in Roman history, but there's not much call for us these days.

Jack. Well, you can't stay on the dole all your life.

Hughie. Oh, I'll get a job. I'll get something. (Flashback.) I'll go on the stage, become a film-star! Australia's answer to King Kong.

(Hughie remembers an empty King Kong to Jack about the next time, Maggie at King Kong, suspiciously catches up Sean's prospect, and it to see if it's viable, eventually takes it over his shoulder Sean picks it up.)

Jack. You're bloody mad! (The phone rings. *Carrying Jack's* envelope. *Hughie* drops his act. All three pause for a moment. *Jack* reaches out to the phone.)

Hello? *Jack* Harvey speaking. Who?

(Caroline's) No, you got a pay phone here, mate. Yeah. Ah, go to the toilet.

(Maggie at Brenda. Mark forced good America.) Wrong number. Pella wanting to hire a top-track? Dumbo how he got that number? *(Pause)*.

Sean (*peering*). Yes. Well, I think we'd better be making a move.

Jack. Ah, don't go yet?

(Unnoticed by Jack, Caroline enters left.)

Hughie. We don't have to go yet.

Jack. Sit down! Have some more beer.

Hughie. I'll drink to that!

Sean. Thanks Jack, but

Jack. Come on, finish it up.

Jack turns *notices Caroline and Jack about Caroline's day Jack*.

Jack (*amused*). Well, look what the cat's brought in.

Sean. Sean starts to go *without to Hughie that he should do the same*.

Jack. No, it's all right, son. You sit down. This was I like a romantic. (Sean *not* reflects.) To Gordon? What brings you in this neck's the woods?

Caroline. I wanted a word with you. I thought I'd find you here.

Jack (*amused*). Pull up a chair! Make yourself at home.

Gordon. I or I wanted to talk to you in private.

Jack. If you wanna talk, you talk here. Sean! Look.

Jack. Stay where you are, son. If he's got anything to say, he can say it here. He's a bit too fond of talking behind people's backs.

Sean *Gordon and Jack sit down*.

Gordon. It's about work.

Jack (*amused*). Ah, yeah.

Gordon. Carl we talk at the bar? I don't really trust him. Gordon's enjoying his drink, Gordon's enjoying his drink. I All right. I've been thinking, ever what happened last month and I reckon — well, I reckon I might have a bit of a problem as you. (Jack remembers a conversation with I said some things — well I reckon we both said things. And after all these years, if we can't. After twenty eight years, well.

Sean. Jack's a real character.

Jack (*amused*). How is Myra, Gordon?

Gordon. All right, you've had your fun.

Jack. Ah, no, I haven't started yet. I haven't even started. How is Myra — and how's good old Barry, and the brother-in-law and you make Carly Mason — all the pals who were gonna help you out? How they going?

Sean.

Gordon (*peers*). Listen, Jack, Carly might be giving me a spot on the show.

Nothing fixed, nothing sorted, but he's been dropping a few letters and I reckon it's difficult. I'll gotta chance how if that happens and they know it could mean a TV contract with Carly's new career. If the offers are so nothing, it'll come off, I want you to be in it. It's up to you, but you I have to make up your mind. (Sean's got to be ready to negotiate).

Sean.

Jack. I thought I'd had my last chance.

Gordon. I've said I'm sorry, Jack.

Jack. And you think that makes it open, do you?

Gordon. I'm offering you a job?

Jack. Well, I don't need your bloody job!

Gordon. Ah, come off it. (Pause.)

Would you mind Jack I'm sorry.

Sean.

Jack (*amused*). What's sorry about? I said I don't need your job. I don't. I'm working on a new act. Brand new. Gonna be a younger audience. (Addressing Hughie.)

Materialist, that is my new partner.

Hughie. Hughie, Gordon.

Hughie (*amused*). Please to meet you.

Sean. Gordon's a wonderful

Gordon (to Jack). Listen. Look, I know how you feel.

Jack. Well, all I know is you can keep your job. And don't only keep it, stick it.

Gordon. Yeah, you're sitting off your nose to spend your life, you know that. (Pause.)

Gordon (*amused*). If you change your mind, you know where to reach me.

Jack. I want to change my mind.

Gordon (*amused*). From Jack, as Hughie's a real character.

Hughie (*amused*). Well, that's for the job.

Jack (*amused*). Well, that's for the job. (Jack *amused* and, with forced enthusiasm) Sorry about that. Couldn't let that bugger get away with you. Listen.

Hughie That's all right. Please do. — Look, the walked out on the sea, then twenty-eight years later that I was. I'd been carrying the act for years, but the way it was taken over, y'know. Turned out all against me — all the agents, all the clubs. Him and his mate Carly Mason frightened of the campaign was his they got it all seen up — got a professional class going. Carly's in it up to here. That's how he made his money. Taken. Remember all those clubs that have done? Bloody Carly Mason. Common knowledge.

Hughie I thought they'd bought the people who did that.

Jacker Ah, yeah! Said it was a pack of liars! Can y'imagise it, pack of liars, explaining that. — No. No, the big boys are all right. I wish her finger and thumb together! No women. Carly. Bloody Mason! All right.

Peace.

Sean (interrupting as everybody else proceeds). Oh well, sounds as if you're better off out of it.

Jack Out of it? Who's out of it? No one's gonna push me! Jack Harvey mate. They won't get me out.

Hughie Can't keep an old dog down, eh?

Jack Two right. (Plays Jack, looks at Hughie.) I'm — I'm serious, you know about the job.

Hughie What?

Jack The partnership, you and me.

Hughie What?

Jack (with a touch of desperation). Why not? You've got the talent! You're a natural! First thing I noticed about you! I'd show you the ropes!

Peace. Hughie stares at Jack, with a mixture of amazement and surprise. An uncle brooder.

Hughie You've got yourself a deal.

Jack gives a row of laughter and slaps Hughie on the back. Sean watches in consternation. Aloud out.

SCENE 4

Jack's flat.

While she are a being changed. Jack and Hughie are heard distinctly laughing and talking softly.

Jack (soft). No, no, no! I like this. One, two, three and —

Crashing sounds as Jack demonstrates a dance move.

Hughie (soft). I can't do that. I'll rupture myself! How about this?

Crashing sounds. Hughie.

Jack (soft). Silly bugger! Come inside and I'll show you properly.

Hughie (soft). Just a minute, I've got a Right One, two, three and —

Crashing sounds. Jack's brother, tapping Hughie. Sean on the table are the remains of Jack's last meal as he sits on the floor. Hughie and Hughie enter, falling about with drunken laughter. Sean follows them and utters.

Hughie (trapping him as he enters). Well, I don't think I've missed my occasion. Jack (grinning). Ap. That's right, face. — (Hughie and Jack, now with daughter's) Reckon he thought he was coming things.

(More laughter.) — Aw dear. Windy, having been in trouble?

Hughie (slight gasp). Scornish accent? A wee scotch and water please. Dr. Cameron (shouting). Scornish voice? Aye, Jack, coming up. (High Scornish voice.) You'll watch your manners! Dr. Cameron.

Hughie (shouting). You shouldn't give! (shouting). Sean (shouting). (shouting).

Jack (in voice). Sean? Windy?

Sean No thanks. I've had enough for tonight.

Jack All come on! We haven't started yet! Sean No, honestly.

Jack (continuing). All right, please yourself. (Offering our own whiskey.) (Sean on the race from the house now, oh Hughie!)

Hughie My word!

Jack (horrible thing not to be able to hold your liquor — for a man that is). (Whisper to daughter, holding a glass.) (Sean, it is an advantage to a woman, eh? Know a girl once — two glasses a sherry. — Had a spine a mile long waiting to buy her a drink. Ah dear!

Jack goes out through the doorway.

Sean (in a doctor's whisper). All right. How much longer are you going to let this go on?

Hughie (shouting). What?

Sean You know perfectly well it's not funny.

Hughie Don't you think so? I think it's superb. I think we make a lovely couple.

Sean Do you honestly think he's not going to realise?

Hughie (shouting). Reckon what? Hughie (staring). "Hughie and Jack" — Rums. (Purs. New York.) I thought you would have it off in any case, I think I could just about defend myself against a one-armed drink.

Sean Yes, you could. It doesn't occur to you to think of his feelings.

Hughie Aah. — Mr New Guy. Mr Nick. Guy. Sean (smug). G. Sullivan. Grow up. If he was fifteen years younger he'd beat you up with a second thought.

Sean Yes, but he's not, is he?

Hughie! Grow him a good night's sleep and he won't even remember we existed.

Sean You saw his face — of course he will. Hughie, be a patel!

Hughie Save your pity for those who deserve it.

Sean The people who really need pity aren't drunk.

Hughie gives three slow hand claps.

Hughie Next time you see them, tell him I'm intrigued. (Back he set aside time for inventing facile paradoxes, as do they just come to him, no supposed moments on the parallel hand?)

Peace. Jack enters carrying the glass of whisky and water.

Jack Here y'are, got this down y'. (Tried to get y' some on but the doctor's jammed down Hughie the glass.) Still, it's not the son you're worried about, eh? (To Sean.) Come on, mate! Take a seat, make

yourself at home. (Laughs. Half time — you're a cheek! I bet you are!) Jack (shouting). (You're a cheek!) Sean It's all right. I'd rather stand. Jack (shouting). (You're a cheek!) Well, I'm glad someone around here can still stand, eh?

Hughie Set down, Sean, you've made your point.

Sean grudgingly sits on the table. Jack What point? What's the matter with him?

Sean —

Hughie Well, you see, Sean doesn't approve of me becoming your partner. Jack (impressed). Ah, yeah, what's wrong with me?

Sean It's not you, it's dear. He's just He can't sing and dance. He'll ruin your act!

Jack Yeah. Well, I'll be the judge of that. Sean Jack, I'm not suggesting you don't know your own business.

Jack What are you suggesting?

Hughie Laugh.

Hughie Poor old Sean! Look, Sean, take some advice from an old friend. Just be quiet. Come on, Jack, down to business, gentlemen. What do I have to do?

Jack Well, all depends on what sort of audience we're aiming for. Sean y'can't treat a bunch of teenagers like you would a bunch of fellows. Sean to reason — different tastes a humour. You gotta be adaptable. That's professionalism. Now we can do any one of a number of things.

Song and dance, character parts, impersonations. All depends what sort of audience we're after. Ah! That depends on what you can do.

Hughie Me?

Jack All right, I can't dance. What we gotta bring money, we'll get you known. What we gotta do is find out your real talent. Find that out and have everything stand it. Now, even done any singing? Can you act? Do different accents, then some thing?



Hughie: Ah well, now you're talking. Anything's one thing I really can do.

Jack: Right, write in business. We'll invent a character for you and build on that.

Hughie: What sort of character?

Jack: Anything you like. Yours's a good one, so's a pig — or a drink. You can do a lot with a drink.

Hughie: I bet. What'll you do? Will you write a character?

Jack: Could be. Depends what we can think up.

Hughie: (pausing a thoughtful frown). Well, now, it's not. How about I'm a pig and you're a drink?

Jack: (astonishedly). Well.

Hughie: Well, how about two pigs? Lot of pigs gets there.

Jack: Now you're talking! I've got material for that.

Scene change

Sue: (nervely) I'm going.

Hughie: (sincerely). Sue? What's her's the matter?

Scene shifts abruptly as Hughie for a moment then goes out through the doorway. Hughie (nervously) to Sue:

Hughie: (nervously). Well . . . He's got a flea in his ear! Moody bastard! Still (Laughing), when a man's gotta go, a man's gotta go, eh? Eh? (Gesturing up.)

Come on, drink up, me got a long way to go yet! (nods one)

Hughie: (gracefully holding out his glass). Why not?

Jack collects the whiskey bottle from the table.

Jack: Sue, the trouble about character eggs is that they're all been done before. You gotta bring in a new gimmick, give 'em something new to laugh at — or they'll cravely y' (Pours out drink). Cravely y' at the drop of a hat. So. What we gotta do is get a gimmick. A gimmick. I'm all right, got a steady-made gimmick right here (On drinking his left one). You're the one we gotta worry about (Plunks for a moment).

Enthusiastically. Tell y' what, how about you pretending your own's crook — no we both come on like this (Lingers to his feet, steps a morning walk, swinging his parasol/yard arm in grotesque effort).

Collapsing, laughing into his chair. Aw, bleed two of us coming on. "Whelp's muck!" (Pours).

Hughie: Tell you what. You work it out and I'll do whatever you say.

Jack: Aw, come on! What's the matter?

Hughie: (sincerely). Jack, I don't know anything about these things. You're the professional, you decide.

Jack: You're not hush-hush are y', about joining the act? Cause if you are . . .

Hughie: I'm not! I'm not!

Jack: Yeah. Well, you'd better not be. Little young fellow'd give their eyes teeth for the chance you're getting, mate. There's not many old-timers who'd take on a youngster specially with the experience.

(Pours.) Well, here's to the act!

Hughie: To the act!

Pours Jack's drink down. He gradually grows more agitated. He looks at the photograph of himself and Gordon.

Jack: (sincerely). Yeah. Well. Hope y' turn

out better than most partner. Gordon bloody Dobbs (Pours). Ah, he was all right. Safe round him. Was all right (He mutes her). Whatever y' do, don't get married. Seen it happen too many times. Doesn't young bloke get married, that's it. That's the end of him.

Hughie: You married?

Jack: Me? You're kidding? No, never married no, mate, no worries (Pours).

Come over a few times. Na, I was lucky (Taps his left arm and winks). That'll do (Pours). Check! Ay, ay, gonna tell y' something. Tell y' a secret, tell y' a secret.

Hughie: What?

Jack: (gushing his left arm gurgling). He's got a name. Guess what his name is, go on.

Hughie: Dennis.

Jack: Jack! His name's Jack! Every morning I say to him — he's lying there — I say "Get up, Jack, you old bastard!"

Hughie: "Get up, you bastard. I know you're taking." (Gurgles). Ah, dear. Yeah, old Jack knows how to deal with the women, my mate. Old Jack knows how to turn 'em off, doesn't y' mate? He goes 'em the cold shoulder all night! He goes 'em the cold shoulder!

Jack continues gurgling. Hughie who has been staring intensely at Jack, a sudden shock in the black corner of the situation begins to break.

Jack: (deliberately). You reckon I'm mad, don't y' mate? You reckon I got screw loose, y' bugger?

Hughie now closed shading work. Hughie waves his hand in front of Jack, who looks at Hughie with a sudden fright.

Jack: You're a good bloke — you know that? Wouldn't you me Aunt Fanny's cat for most of them these days, but you're a good fellow. Good sense a hammer. That's what I like in a fellow. More a them, they got those . . . rats . . . rats. You missed that? Ever since the war. Wouldn't I turn 'em as far I could throw 'em. That's why, when I saw you, I thought "Now there's a good bloke. There's a genuine fellow. You got a good face. A good, open face, good smile. An Aussie face. Name's the pretty, by the way. A beauty, young Aussie beauty."

Pause. Hughie gets up.

Hughie: I've gotta go. I've gotta get out of this place.

Jack: (softly). Yeah. Come over sometime night. (Rings). I'll have something ready by tomorrow night.

Hughie suggests on nothing Jack to this where he is. Jack drops laughing into his chair. Signs purple looks at the photograph of Gordon.

Jack: Well up you, Gordon! Up you, Gordon bloody has peaked bloody Dobbs! (Sits grinning drunkenly). Na. Na way (Sits grinning). What I decide to do something, I do it. Look, when you're in the business so long, I have . . . Na.

Pause. His face and manner gradually change as he begins to fantasize a conversation, focusing on a imaginary person.

When I first started in this game, it was a mug. Thought everyone was of course. Everyone was far darker. Everyone was as honest as . . . honest as the day was

long. But y' can't live like that — y' gotta survive. y' gotta. Right — or else you're finished. Through. Kaput! (Pours). Now I'll help a mate out. Do me a favour for a mate. I do when young Hughie turned up. Young fellow, decent bloke, just started in the business. What harm's it do me going him a start? No, if y' can't be to your mate as an old-timer can't show the newbies the ropes (Pours). Cause, it's my mate.

No one ever helped this fellow. No one ever gave Jack Harvey something for nothing (Pours). (Sings). A/I right after the war. Am yeah, marvelous. You were a hero then, defeated your country.

People'd come up to y' in the street, all the girls, put you on the back. "How'd it happen, tell us how it happened?" "Aw, took some odds and ends in it/shoulders and chest." (Pours). (Sings).

Twenty-three years old. They nearly unpainted (Pours). Not so obvious like that. Don't notice it so much like this (Pours).

Na, nobody helped Jack Harvey (Pours). What happen? He walks out. After twenty-eight years. Twenty-eight years (Pours). Ah, good rebellion. Good bloody rebellion. (To the photograph). You don't go me down, mate (Sings).

Push me down and I look right up again (Sings). Get myself a new act, new partner. Yeah — you know what you can do with your bloody cherry, mate?

Gone. His mind racing. Rusher coming to the telephone and then a number, counting a long time when the call is answered.

Halla: Myra? This is Jack. Can I have a word with Gordon please?

Yes, I know what the time is. It's . . . it's very important. Could you get him out of bed? I wouldn't do this normally, Myra, but (Covers the microphone and smiles softly).

Yes. Thanks, Myra. (He hears his sister, Barbara, around with delight and anticipation. He goes to Gordon in as rapid as before.)

Gordon! Look mate, I'm . . . I'm sorry to put you up at this time. It's just . . . Aren't you're a pal, mate (Covers softly).

Yeah, well, I just . . . (Sings). A/I I wanted to say was. He blows a loud raspberry into the receiver, hangs up and collapses into laughter. (Blackout).

INTERVAL





"If this *Merchant* did not reap big dividends in excitement, it was for want of risk and enterprise"

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

DON BACHELOR

The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare. Queensland Theatre Company in the SGIO Theatre Brisbane. Opened 11 April 1971. Director, Alan Edwards; designer, James Richmond; music composed by Colin Branks; lighting John Watson; stage manager, Ma Mackay-Gardner.

Antonio, David Clewanger; Shylock, Bruce Paul Sullivan; Portia, Barbara Houston; The Merchant, Kevin Lapan; Gratiano, Douglas Polke; Porcia, Belton Green; Nerissa, Kate Wilson; Stephano, Gail Corbin; Warren Mammoth, Shylock, Don Crooke; Prince of Morocco, Talal; Bassanio, Norman; Lancelo Gobbo, Phil Mays; Lorenzo, Prince of Arragon, Peter Kewitt; Jessica, Elaine Smith; Portia's Messenger, Wendell Campbell; Antonio's Messenger, Johnnie Johnston; Soliman, Bruce Lewis; Duke of Venice, Reg Cummings; Attendants: Celia Fraser and Rose Yancy.

I came away from the QTC production of *The Merchant of Venice* as "worn, with one agonised and one drooping eye", or perhaps the suspicious part of my anatomy was so sore. For I would rate highly, with one or two exceptions, the general fluency and clear sense of the speech on this occasion. It is no mean compliment to say that at the level of craft, the vocal work was a pleasure to hear.

Some days before, the Canberra Theatre's version of *The Winter's Tale* had been poor in this department. David Gurney, the director had managed to iron out occasions of posturing, but, for all the coaching, some phrases were mangled, and one or two people (notably Wendy Nugent as Hermione) were largely unresponsive. This was the more astounding since the staging was delightfully serene.

By contrast, the QTC *Merchant* was highly intelligible even in its detail. The reason for my one drooping eye was that it remained largely unaffected. Only occasionally did Alan Edwards's decision strike that spark which spurs the creative energies of a cast and transforms the ordinary into the exceptional.

Such was the case in the Bassanio market scene. Here, assuming that Portia's racing emotions could not be contained in the established, and by now habitual intensity, Edwards allowed free rein to the actress, Rubya Guray, and she responded with what was for me the best scene of the play, culminating in the wonderfully generous speech "You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand." The response from Tim Hughes as Bassanio was eager and sensitive. Indeed, in company, these two generated an excitement about characters Tim Hughes gave the best performance of the evening — easily and not. It was interesting to see that, judged by the SGIO Theatre, he employed a dynamic range that meant we lost significant words too often.

Don Crooke simply did not contain the part of Shylock. At first appearing the portrayal suggested a man world-weary in his bitterness, his hatred for Antonio being coldly calculated rather than searching. In fact, promisingly after Jessica stole off with Lorenzo (and she loved, but then I found), hampered by a sort of involuntary delivery, the performance approached rather the heights of understandable rage and the depths of reprehensible malice.

Counterpointed against this low-key adversary, David Clewanger's Antonio came across as melodramatic. A further imbalance of interpretation in this role was caused by the director's allowing Antonio to become peripheral in the closing scenes. He is after all the core of the play. He is the Merchant of Venice. He is the one who actually does "give and hazard all he hath"; and though he has only seven lines in the final Belmont scene, five of them represent his ultimate giving of himself for his beloved friend Bassanio — "I dare be bound again, my soul upon the fault." Is this play about self-giving, is there a character more central?

The Merchant presents some translating problems to a designer. The action switches back and forth between Venice and Belmont, and in the structure a sort of spiritual counterpart is intended. The design challenge is to support the starkly contrasting worklives, turmoil, and decay of Venice and the style, serene, timelessness of Belmont, but to do so

without cumbersome set changes. Basically, James Richmond's idea of some noble yet elegant, always crane-shielded with timber which could be front-lit to suggest solidity in Venice, and back-lit for a more ethereal Belmont was good. In practice, the atmospheric difference between the two situations was insufficient, and Venice in particular suffered from being altogether too clean-cut a place.

The production was set in the Regency period, and if there is any dramatic or social significance in that, it escapes the fluency out of my historical knowledge. It certainly provides stylish costumes, and Richmond made the most of it in some really glowing work. In this he was well served by the wardrobe department, whose cutting and making caught the line and spirit of the period admirably.

In the end, then, the achievement was one of craft not art. A lot of time, effort and money were invested in this *Merchant*. If it did not reap the big dividends in terms of excitement, it was for want of risk and enterprise.

"Keep it moving, play it broad and belt it is the required style . . . That's what this cast did"

SOMETHING'S AFOOT

DON BACHELOR

Something's Afoot, based on Agatha Christie's *The Little Vampire*, directed by James McInnes; David Yang, Robert Griffith and Ed Lushmore. Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane. Opened 14 April 1971. Director, Joan Whiskey; designer, Jennifer Cavelline; musical director, Kenneth Baines; Celia, Joe James; Lancelo Gobbo, Alan Smith; Phil, Wilson; Judge Langdon, Les Davis; The Governor, Jim Seabrook; Nigel, Ransome; Paul, Charles; Lady Maudie, Pegg; Joe, Harris; Cal, Gifford; Jessica, Maudie Smith; Mrs. Dwyer, Sandra-Lee; Portia, Gail; Andrew, Andrew.

The fortunes of theatre companies are cyclic. The best of them get in a bind from time to time. Often all that's needed to get things moving again is an effective theatrical hazard, as to speak, and that's exactly what Joan Whiskey administered in Twelfth Night's production of *Something's Afoot*. Whatever it achieves for the theatre, it did not a power of good.

Consider me less than surprised things

holds our interest throughout. What's particularly impressive is that this is achieved without the usual mental involvement. ("We're all the same underneath") or, say, the film *Coolie's Travels* is coldly objective, and the girl Ruby uses every weapon youth and cunning have given her.

When the play opens, Ruby is living at home being "buggered" by her mother to assist in the theatre and in two months' pregnancy by a young married man who humiliated his own. Her brother gets into a fight over the rumours and later dies. Three weeks later, Ruby makes her first money: a registry office wedding to a rather nervous-minded adviser. It's a calculated step which solves the marriage problem and gets her out of her mother's house.

A year later, she's back in the house with a baby daughter and the widow's pension. She's sorry for her husband's death (in a "trivial accident"), but that doesn't stop her enjoying to the full the advantages a year's marriage have given her: she tries to stand up to her mother and turn her into a useful baby-carrier, and a knowledge of contraception which is clearly going to come in handy when the wealthy young man staying at the Gaiety arrives but her girlfriend won't on all-night dancing expeditions. But then she blows it, using a razor (the razors about her own parentage) which her mother can't take. The mother swindles, and suddenly Ruby's left with the baby, the flat to look after, the clocks to find the eggs to collect, and the chance of escape considerably diminished.

Intensive discussion, interpretation, and re-viewing have hated the first two scenes to a very high standard of craftsmanship. It's a perfect example of why it's essential for our playwrights to have access to good directors and actors working towards full performance. Rehearsed readings such as those undertaken by the local women's group Playbills are only a pale substitute for the intensive and goal-oriented work that took place during this production. The potentially revolutionary first scene now looks credible and therefore in its climax, and the daughter's departure — a scene which must read very flatly on paper — developed its spine and progression through the detailed rehearsal of action: the mother replacing emotion with dogged house-planning, the daughter countering with steady purposeful packing as she prepares to leave, and the dialogue shaped to flow smoothly over this bare rhythm.

More work will need to be done on the second half of the play, particularly the ending, where the daughter, caught in the same economic trap that crippled her mother, starts following her pitfalls and actions. Ruby runs head-on, and as the end sets in, we've come to believe too strongly in her quick-wittedness to accept a sudden total capitulation to fate.

It's a fine play — a little dated perhaps in the debt to the kind of script written 50 years ago by Tennessee Williams, a little reassured in its small cast and dependence on an intimate playing-space. But its quiet honest voice and thorough craftsmanship were pleasure indeed.

Queensland Playwrights' Conference



A plea for writers

Melanie Fraser's fervent world I'm told is responsibility, and everyone's jumping on the bandwagon, proving they're responsible by defining responsibility to mean what they're doing already. Capital is I am, I think we ought to be able to use language and logic more profitably than that.

Of the groups and group representatives present at La Bode, Brisbane, for the Queensland Playwrights' Conference on 2 and 3 April, two at least had a valid claim to be making a responsible effort to help Queensland writers. Rick Hellingmore (artistic director of La Bode) had provided the original suggestion for a conference, the venue, and all three of the Queensland plays in performance on the Sunday afternoon and evening. Playbills, who'd organised the conference, had arranged for Katherine Brinkman to talk on "Problems of Publishing New Plays", Alan Edwards (artistic director of the QTC) to talk on "Problems of Performing New Plays", and a number of workshops and demonstration classes on playwriting scripts, writing for young people etc.

There was a hell of a lot more to be worked this a discussion of responsibility to writers, but that's what has stuck in my mind as the crucial issue raised: it encapsulates the feeling which I hear expressed widely at present, and which is unexpressed thus. Playbills doing as much as it can. La Bode can afford to take on something as unconventional as three national local plays only when it gets special subsidy to do so (a La Bode Foundation grant in the present case). Where do we go from here?

Both Alan Edwards in his speech to the conference and Colin George (the new artistic director of the SATC) in Peter Ward's article on him in the *Australian* recently, attempted to define the responsibility of a state theatre company to the community. These attitudes were virtually identical: responsibility for public money means backing subsequent successes by a steady programme of classes — and adding "new things" later. Writers were scarcely mentioned by either.

This concept was challenged at the conference, most notably by Rick Helling-

more. He argued that companies receiving large public subsidies had a responsibility to get these funds in risk, to operate on their own commercial principles. And that one major use of risk funds should be to present the work of new — particularly local — writers. The SATC and QTC counter is that no Australian audience enough people want theatre at all, and otherwise success depends on backing audiences for at least 10 years by giving them only the tried and proven.

The QTC has just made a tentative step towards helping local writers by offering a \$1000 prize for the best script by a Queensland resident submitted before September. The company I work with considers this spending \$2500 a year employing a not justified when a total subsidy figure of about \$40,000, they do so for exactly the reasons I outlined in my discussion of *Freebills* — the importance of writer, director, and actors working together as a creative team. For the QTC to offer \$1000 out of a total subsidy of \$500,000 (%), I'm guessing, and to do so in a way which tends to break down the creative relations of writers from the theoretical problems and from the practical as process seems to me to be a token gesture only.

Everywhere, it seems, I hear the complaint: most cases of those I think are making magnificent contributions to Australian theatre. And then I hear the confident voices of our main directors proclaiming public responsibility while they boldly disp our support. Theatrical resistance back into the tradition of English provincial rep, lobbying off cultural nationalists and those who want a major reassessment of priorities with the plea: Give us time, give us time.

May I offer, then, a parable?

It is 1981. Hitler, having overrun West Iran and East Timor, controls Papua New Guinea. Heistman will later point to German army documents dating back to the West Irian takeover which openly proclaim Germany's ambitions in that region. CIA-related political instability and a series of coups in Port Moresby give Hitler the excuse to move in. Australia's Prime Minister flies to Berlin and returns waving a vague sales agreement, saying, "Papua was in Germany's sphere of influence. Peace on our terms!" When Hitler takes Christmas Island, however, Australia declares war, but it quickly overruns Australian occupation guerrillas, huddling in their bunker, console themselves "Many nations", they say. "Have had their territories overrun. But history shows that it is a people's culture which survives and which then is times of oppression. Let us appeal a revolutionary 'Minister of Culture'." By secret channels the chosen candidate's policy speech is heard: "We need time," says the Minister. "Before we can have a truly Australian culture. I suggest we begin therefore, with Charles's new." Rough and attempt. Australian run to their feet in spontaneous action. "Thank God, they city is not, for an artist with a sense of responsibility."



"... a case of not being able to see the church for all the scaffolding that hid it..."

CHURCH

ROGER FULFERN

Chadley by Alma de Groen. Canberra Repertory Society, Theatre Clinic, Canberra. Opened March 11. Director, Joyce MacFarlane; set designs, Ross McGregor; lighting designs, Nadia Wright; costumes, John Speed; stage manager, Phil Harris.

William James Chadley, Hugh Buchanan. Ade Turnbull, Bernardine Vincent, Wally Turnbull, Bernard McLinden, The Jinks, John Bartholomew. Inspector Brennan, Ian Hunter. Dr Wilson, Colin Gilbert. Madam and Richard, Ian Bedford.

Alma de Groen's work — comic, witty, poetically beautiful, cutting — has had two extremes rubbing inside it the social message, the idea in the play, overriding a beautifully naturalistic sub-plot. The only play that didn't deliver this pattern was *The After Life of Arthur Croun*, up to *Going Home*, but most profound but misunderstood drama.

Her plays share that with Dorothy Hewitt's, although Dorothy Hewitt's poetic line is hardly matched by anybody. Both playwrights, too, shared the neglect of the early twentieth of our theatre where blood-sweat-tears realism was demanded

by most managements and dramatists had to be of the worst-and-all variety to be considered producible. Any poetic cinema or true beauty only squeezed through while the Board of Governors wasn't looking.

The love triangle sub-plot has been with Alma's plays since *The Soapproof Day* quilled, by the way, by a certain Dutch dramatist. *The Soapproof Day* is surface again in *Chadley*, but this time merely as hand contrast to Chadley-the man's rights of prophecy. It makes a good deal of sense dramatically and highlights a wonderful brief pitienne from which Chadley-the man may escape.

Unfortunately, Joyce MacFarlane's production of the play for Rep never did escape from the domestic sub-plot. The result of the production is maddening of the homotopia, home-cooked, and awfully homely variety. The character of Wally, for instance, was a problem here. Bernard McLinden played the part, perhaps because he wasn't supported by the director, in the style of a Woolloomooloo High School production of Parlo's *The Curiouser*. This added frightfully to a cliché.

In *Chadley*, a play partly about habers of drama, the costumes are very important. Chadley's belief was that oppressive English-style clothing was not fit for our climate. This production didn't spend enough thought on costumes. The inspectors were a bit that didn't fit the style of the row. And Chadley himself looked hideous in the robes and nightgowns they gave him rather than looking liberated and comfortable as he must have.

Bernadette Vinagre's performance as Ade was the best thing about the production. She was the "good girl" that the play calls for, aparky, compassionate of Chadley's philosophy of against of its challenges, a woman caught between two husbands, one of the mind and one of the

body. She herself, however, was not free enough with her body. Too many times on the mattress she pulled her dress down sufficiently. Chadley's discovery of the mattress. However method of penetration demands a scene on the bed at the end of Act One where both actors use their bodies very skillfully. Chadley's message is one of expansive mind over expanding matter. It is serious — that men go around with emotions in their pants and that this constitutes the threat of violence. By refusing to have an erection, Chadley was denouncing violence against women and in this he was no less profound of current than Gandhi. But the scene in bed intended to demonstrate Chadley's revolution and show it up as a crazy comic interlude is a kind of bedlam soap opera.

Chadley was written specifically for the small space in the old "Theatrical". It didn't fare well on Rep's wide stage for the same reason that intimate plays don't work in the Drama Theatre of the Opera House. This play requires a focused centre where all or most of the drama should take place. By spreading it out to fill a long stage it loses some of its power. The last scene, in particular, was done to one side, in the back, behind glass. This nullified Chadley's beautiful final monologue and retracted something from the play's message.

Before she re-wrote it, Alma de Groen had *Chadley* imagining himself in the genre as the drama. The new ending, written for the People production, is better. But in the Rep production it was subtracted and barely seen off.

Alma de Groen's plays combine several theatrical elements and they combine them with skill, thought, and dramatic integrity. But they are not easy to produce, especially if the domestic-character structure overpowers the truth in them. This production was a case of not being able to see the church for all the scaffolding that hid it. ■



"There are . . . valuable insights into the play . . . and yet it is not satisfying"

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

PETER WARD

The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov. South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse, Festival Centre, Adelaide. Opened 7 April 1977. Director: Colin George. Designer: Rodney Frost. Music by: Michael Fisher. Assistant director: Brian Debusse. Lighting: Noel Longue range manager, Gabrielle Bridges.

Mr Ransevsky, Bulk Tracthead, Anna, Anne, Prudovsky, Varya, Dunstley Vernon, Gayoff, Renee James, Lopokhin, Dunstley, Oliver Tracthead, Ronald Felt, Polachuk, Boris Vlas, Christina, Stephen Gorr, Epistodoff, Leslie Hayden, Danyasha, Nicholas Stuppin, Fara, Edwin Hodgson, Yasha, Patrick Frost, a Sergeant, Cyril Vailin, Post Office Clerk, Alan Anderson, Sonoma, Michael Fisher, Colin Firth, Douglas Foster, Michael Sherry, Rolfi Russell.

It is mid-summer in Old Russia, the revolution is only a decade or so ahead, the emancipation of the serfs is well a month, the bourgeoisie is rising and the old Russian falling, and property — above all, property — is changing hands, dividing families, obscuring the past and diverting the future.

In *The Cherry Orchard* the fruit is watered and sown, the old grafted trees are about to be swept away by economic history, just as their owners, the aging rural gentry, are to be swept away by political history. The storm has been building for decades and now blows over the great plains that Chekhov knew so well. As a political case manager he is only an oddling word, but as an artist, emotional and observer of the times, he is a poet.

Madame Ransevsky belongs to that rural gentry. She is a soft, scarer-breasted woman who tries to make large emotional gestures. But so rapidly are things happening in her old Russia that all she has time to do is look askance at history and life with a bewilderment that is made sharper by property and class and a cognate blindness that sits heavily on her middle-age.

She is "too low" with her meagre house and its orchard. Fara, the handsome blue-stocking secretary, and a financially

runaway love affair, he befell her. But they are well masters of scandal and concern in the returns home to forget, having forgotten that she is as married in Russia as she was in France.

Only the sun of a sort tries to help, and argues for the substitution of the poem within so that it can be sold as such to some wealthy members of the new urban middle-class can take their holidays.

Madame Ransevsky responds to Lopokhin as you would expect a lady in her position to respond the notion of financial marriage, is frankly necessary, not to say important, coming from the son of a man the family once owned? If only he would become property and marry her daughter Varya, that would solve everything and life could proceed with sweet, unobtrusiveness, despite Ransevsky's ornaments and Lom's scribbles.

And then the house, the grand old house through which once strided admirals and generals, that now can only command the contempt and post-office clerk. It is still the house — solid, substantial, gracefully and even romantically random, as much by the resources of time as by the loss of fortune. Such old places do not need to put on modern show to proclaim their importance, but they belong where they are, and it has always been so.

And so when Madame Ransevsky has arrived, flustered with excitement and enthusiasm, surrounded by family, friends and servants, penniless and flighty, she is greeted by Fara, the family's old valet, a serf who regards his emancipation as a tragedy, and who, as Madame Ransevsky's world of property relations badly handled, is really just another child to be left behind.

When all fails, when Lopokhin himself keeps house and orchard but does not marry Varya, when Madame returns to her Paris lover and the family and household are dispersed, when the nation is based in the cherry orchard and the exiled Lopokhin has looked up the house — after Fara, locked in with the disinherited furniture, rumbling, his life's education: "Life has gone by as if I'd never lived."

In these times you have to say *The Cherry Orchard* is really a modern comedy play and that one of the reasons why it is so consistently misinterpreted is because the morality is socialist rather than Christian or humanist. The play belongs to its time and the great sentimental form that Russia was in then, and to find it here like that is to misunderstand and centre its contemporary relevance than and now. Madame

Ransevsky is really one of a great line of flighty houses and houses who have been produced by 19th and 20th century writers and film-makers to illustrate social decay, moral immorality and bad faith.

The Cherry Orchard is then a tragedy of comedy and is both completely, and has always been in its direction and case. Stanislavsky's first production for the Moscow Arts Theatre set the pattern of the problem by playing it with great sentimentality. To my mind, this is a particularly justifiable reading, but as offended Chekhov, who complained that it should have been played more comic. The South Australian Theatre Company's production has taken this cue and developed it as far as I think it could go without dangerously interfering with sense and the playwright's basic scheme that someone it doesn't work. There are high moments, moments of tension and tenderness, valuable laughs into the play if not into the disasters, and yet it is not satisfying. Like the song, you want to keep asking: "Is that all there is?" to that all there is no.

One of the main problems that Colin George's production had to deal with was Rodney Frost's design. It set a tone consistent with the play's drive. Highly patterned and decorative, it lacked the substance needed to make property and history important, valuable, and worth pining for. The house and orchard should have had a physical presence as actual as Fara is himself, while in Act 2 we should have been able to see something of the orchard in the wide distance, as the abstracted shapes of the grave stones posted the road of change and decay and dying fall. In short, the *As You Like It* mood was wrong for the business of a play about a house more than a century old, one almost as old and guarded as the cherry trees.

The poem needs to be followed a better old Russia or old money was helped by the lack of substance, and I was sorry for the actors who had to chop-and-choose a tradition and age as ephemeral game that would stand as if it is some hollow conclusion. It is after all a pre-eminently such play — there has to be a frame of some kind to provide a credible context in which the characters can develop and work.

And work, of course, in the word. In another sense, some of the characters in this production didn't, entirely, especially Patrick Frost's Vasha, the fellow young valet, and Brian James's Gayoff, Madame Ransevsky's fool of a brother. Patrick Frost tried for a kind of vocalisation stylish silliness, but did not reach it. — Ed as

actor such recognition should be made of before staff Brian James, on the other hand, worked hard and almost made it, but unfortunately was all too rushed and flippant. The latter an unfortunate quality since it is Lapokhan who is required to afford, by his lack of control and tendency to flap his arms about

Dennis Urean played Lopukhin with his usual style and vigour, but his rendition of the character was not ideal. He was a kind of country doctor, clever, well-grounded, charming, honest, a man at times gloriously united with life. And while there is something of these qualities in Lopukhin, there should also be an air of mystery in his manner and attitude towards Madam Ranevskaya, together with a boyish-guy exuberance when he finally becomes better than his betters.

Anna Finkelsbury's Anya, Dorothy Yarnes's Anna, Michele Stieffler's Dorothy, and Gayle Grey's excellent Charlotta, were all solid people and performers, and Linda Dayman's Ephedra! was a moving evocation of a man (or the other hand, while it is hard to question the initial conception, Karen Miller's roaring Surrealist-Proletarian was a little hard to take, pitched too out-front and impulsively. He was in starkish contrast to Ronald Falk's eternal student, Trufanoff, the one who most clearly knows where Russia is heading, and is hoping to travel there too. Ronald Falk is clearly one of the most important among newcomers. Celia George has made in the past few months

And finally Edwin Hodgeman's *Fire* and Patsy Cruckall's *A Modern Mannequin*. On opening night, both Cruckall's performance was uncertain, albeit consistent, and clearly she was not relaxed up in the role. A week later, she was far more in control, far closer to the right peak of bitter-sweet middle-aged foolishness, naughtiness and angst. What it was still not quite there, she knew was still missing, and it was as if she was watching herself, rather than feeling herself, act.

But not so with Teddy McGowan's brilliant Fann who terrorized around the place, the best of males and culture concerns, the character who is as essential to the play as Medea, the house and the mother, who ties the past and the present together and who is spared no cuts the coming storm but any further extension of life as a future old, married old, woman.

"It's easy to criticise. But the production deserves praise and plenty of it . . ."

BACK THE BUFFER

[illegible]

Federal Center Trust presents Adelaide Theatre Group. The Space Adelaide Federal Centre. Opens 13 April, 1977. Director, Bruce Williams, Choreography, Mrs. Bird Marshall. Director Richard McDonald. Designer, David

John King, Jr., Jermala, Scott Roberts, LARRY
 Jody Gaud, VALERIA, MICHAELE, Mary Anne
 Chomares, Virginia, Beverly, Todd, Anne
 Nicholas, Neil, Little Paul, Little Paul, Little Paul,
 Martin Tappan, Christine Markan, Catherine
 Hollingsworth, Sue Wilson, Frances, Colin, Michelle
 Dwyer, Roger, Rosemary, Dana, Christina, Steve
 Joseph, David, Bill James, Christine, Jon
 Nicholas, Daniel, Mercedes, John Noble, David
 New right, Lisa, Bill, Blue Peter, Sarah, David
 Brian, Steve, William, Michael, 1980, 1980
 Sherman, David, Harshman, Peter, Benjamin
 Colin, Lisa, Steven, Roger, Roy, Mark
 Margaret, Charles, at the Penn, "Fingers"

I have occasionally toyed with an idea which would so doubt be considered heretical by our high priests of drama. It would involve organizing an equivalent of one of those tours on which the participants, suffering from god, over-eating or cut-throat of the liver, used to take the waters at various centres in the dry — oh yes, exactly stop — historical equivalent of this material core, errors and public affairs would be able to drop the indignation and flamboyance which are all too often awarded the reward (?) for an evening in the legitimate (?) theatre (?) theatre, by regular attendance at various religious, political, medical, cultural, national and marketplaces.

In such surroundings the prevalent need for solemn complacency, authoritarian hierarchy and dumb admiration for every lofty and significant thought and gesture would no longer be met. The energy, candour, directness and historical aspects of a performance would come back into their own and be recognised for what they are — the basic ingredients of theatre. End of sermon.

The test for the month which has provided the starting-point for what some circles might be considered the deranged musings of a madman documents in the Adelaide Theatre Group's production of *Jack the Ripper*. It's easy to criticize the husband, as some productions plot, the derivate nature of many of the songs, the stilted, clichéd characters. But the production itself deserves praise and plenty of it: there's more energy, verve and sense of dramatic involvement in five minutes of this crude drama and frankly should work there in the whole two and a half hours of the bloodless, inert example of serious drama currently on the same building.

The songs — by Ron Funcher and Dennis Martin — are a treat by Leonid Brezhnev's *Cherovod* of the Brecht/Weill *Threepenny Opera*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*, and just about every or any musical ball song you care to name. It's a merry pastiche sprawling, disconnected and totally unattached. It never at any stage approaches greatness.

At times it seemed that the director could have paid more attention to the child in the blood and half-crown, half-homosexual fusion which set so much a

of grand guignol and grotesque melodrama. In that sense, the production falls short of the requirements of melodrama like *Yveses*, *Toldi* or *Maria Marini*. But the broad characterisation and outrageously distorted dialogue are for the most part effectively realised and some of the musical numbers were drastically used.

More interesting than a tape of "Pollock's Choice", in which Lou Pavia and his indie appeared to whisper with great confidence and sang of the various plans to trap Jack the Rapper by disguising (1) themselves as women of the streets — and of planets. In an effort to get the whole bag (2) one of them — David Hershovine — was sporting a flaming creation in pink tulle (3) thick, wet, matching breast-browned hair and resonant bass voice. The number itself was the high-point of the show, the lyrics (minus those on any of the others) and the choreography and performance of the song high-pitched and overblown. Mr Hershovine in particular was a delight. He has the advantage of a rich voice, good presence — especially at drag — and a good sense of the ridiculous which neither here nor elsewhere, digressed into arch satire of himself or the others.

Likewise, John Noble made a suitably broad and coarse Mendocino and what he was occasionally lacked in preparation he made up for with enthusiasm and energy — qualities indeed, which motivated everybody's contributions. Jon Noble took the part, but was neither demonstrating nor vocally strong enough to provide the contribution called for in the central role of the *Washoe-Hill* Chairman. Overall the women were vocally weaker, though Jennie Scott-Roberts was in turn appealing and funny as Maria, and obviously showed the others up when it came to producing her songs. MyRay May made the most of her occasional turns as Queen Victoria, though she too had some difficulty with these assignments.

Tying us production together was the musical contribution of Richard McDonald on piano, who also did the musical direction. On both counts — talent and gentleman, hat off! The music is mostly uncomplicated, the tonic dominant triad-dominant shift becomes monotonous and at times all the songs sounded as if they were going to slide into "There was I, waiting at the church" but the choruses work throughout and excellent individual group members well matched and Mr McDonald's piano contribution splendidly stylish, accurate and unbeltingly rhythmic. To keep the pulse of the show going was largely his responsibility and he never lapsed for a moment.

Perhaps the Adelaide Theatre Group will now give us some more one-man-shows; they certainly lost him in comparison with the Sydney production. Their enthusiasm is both real and exciting, and although some might see it as too powerful a discharge, I hope they will not try to ease it by small doses of repentance and regular outward applications of "industrial lubrication".

Join the Paper by Ron Fowler and Dennis De
Morse. Music by Ron Fowler. The Advertis



"... the cast bounced through two hours of sendup and slapstick that sent the audience away singing"

DIAMONDS IN THE

MARGUERITE WELLS

Diamonds in the Sky by Tim Wille and David Sump (at Riverina Trucking Company, Electric Row, 140 Wagga, NSW, opened 18 April 1977). Director, Terry O'Connell; designer, Fred Lynn; musical director, John Rosegreen.

Billy Watt, Nigel Singer, Federico, James Bishop, Penelope, Vanetta, Ruffian, Jonathan Elm, Barbara, Jay, Emma, Brett, Singer, Federico, Bob, Lillian, Transcendence, Street Singer, Frederic, Janet Harris, Bob Ford, Coburn, Geraldine, Peggy, Old Man, Noel, Mollie, Portia, Jerril, Zerkia, Samuels, Federico, Janet, Lillian, Bob, Younger, Michael, Murphy, Ben Simon, Ben Michael, Nathaniel, Vanetta, Ruffian, Constance, Miles O'Vineen, Cole Younger, Phoebe Yell, Toby Preston, Quercus, Honey City, Dean, Wayne, John, Tolson, Frank, James, Governor, Catherine, Mark, Trapsie, Janet, James, Les, Waspier, Jim Younger, Reginald, Tessa, Peter Wright.

It is in some ways a bit different on Australian society that the Riverina Trucking Company performs the life-and-

death story of Jesse James, the American outlaw complete with American accents, both Southern and Yankee, sleazy Mexican poodles, highly peppered Southern beliefs and shady habits, to the manner born. Their one-view-upon-rural Western songs and magnolia-scented ballads had the audience, admittedly an audience of puritans, clapping and stamping and singing along with their good nature. "Watch out, Wagga," the director warned in the programme notes. "The Trucking Company's out to get you. And get them it did, with a embellished and recycled cast, who had originally been chosen for a production of *Equus* and who just happened to have the songs and the singing voices plus the focus needed for this delightful and elegant one musical comedy. True, a certain glaze in the eyes of some of the cast in the first half hinted at the tired far more than four weeks' rehearsal, but some fine acting (particularly from James Larkin) and fine singing from all the cast (but especially James Bishop with "I Don't Need a Man to Know I'm Good") carried them through high and dry. By the gut-punch, pain-sharpening finale of Act 2 ("Kickin' into Kansas City, Wearing Diamond Skins Tonight"), it was obvious that Wagga had a smash-hit on its hands.

This is more than partly due to the work of designer Fred Lynn, whose splendid set was composed of three pieces forming the wings, with concealed ramps, so that people appeared suddenly on top of pieces. After the first half-hour this stopped being

stunningly efficient and became merely highly effective. The pieces were then put to other uses. They became the counter of a bank, the podium of the local hall, a locomotive, a bank safe, and produced money and suit-bags and purses from under their lids. One of the pieces, of course, was the orchestra, and, played by John Rosegreen, the musical director, a very nearly was an orchestra on its own. With three guitars, a harmonica and a washboard (played by Les Waspier in the great Jesse James himself) with a clarity of diction that is a great luxury in these times, and with harmonies that were always pleasant even when not accurate, the cast bounced through two hours of sendup and slapstick and sent their audience away singing.

Despite the superb score, in which the lyrics are as hard-hitting and sometimes as beautiful, as the music is infectious, the play had never been performed outside the United States, and with some reason. The script assumes familiarity with American folklore, history and geography. For Australians who have heard of Jesse James and the American Civil War but who have little idea of what they are, the experience was really not adequate. *Waddy Waddy* might have the same effect on an American audience. The MC's historical and geographical comments, though delivered in a likable, easygoing, even gentle way, to an audience who could not tell the Missouri from the Mississippi, and the historical name-dropping throughout the play (what on earth were Quattrini's parents or the Federals, for instance?) likewise fell on deaf ears.

But what do history and geography matter in the theatre? This play is theatre for the sake of theatre. It sets out to please absolutely nothing, and the director, Terry O'Connell, whose inspired choice it was, wisely took advantage of the fact. Believing that musicals, and particularly Australian musicals, are often too carried far from their own goal, he gave his production the air of a Southern country concert (an or most appropriate to Wagga), and invited to "bring back memories of Saturday afternoons at the local Hoof's, when the world was maybe a bit less real."

The world is not really very simple for a professionally oriented and innovative theatre company in a big country town in southern New South Wales. The Riverina Trucking Company was named at a barbecue in 1976 and two days later had the rights to *Waddy Waddy* and a budget of \$800 — \$50 from each of the 16 original members. Their lights were made from jam tins and their drummer-board with

dancers from *Colts*, and despite dire predictions about the taste of Wagga audiences, the play was a success. They earned people away from full houses in their production of *Amendé's Children*, but their next production, *Sixteen*, a play devised by the company being shown specially for children, brought in no money. *Sixteen* culminated in credits to the programme show where the plotting lands come from and the script to which the company's work has community support, but the names of almost all the actors who figure in the list of donors.

Find Lyne, working tirelessly for no pay, not only did the set and lighting design, but with an army of housewives, painters and cleaners, has converted an abandoned hall at the Myerian C&E into a flexible and functional space. Though the lights are not just on the stage, they do have to be back in the school hall as soon as the season ends, and the real owners have to have their working back for just one night in the middle of the run. (It is not called the Myerian Trucking Company for nothing!)

Tony O'Connell, the director, originally came to Wagga to direct the Wagga School of Arts production of *Cabaret* as his graduation exercise for NIDA. Since then he has directed the Wagga productions of *Comedie L'espresso* (1974), *Yes* and *The Leo Dancy Show*, as well as the Trucking Company's productions. At the moment, he has an Australian Council director's development grant that only until June, and the right to discipline on *Contract, The Coming of Jesus* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*! For now, he will make the trip to Wagga again. Wagga has good theatre.

“... a stream of surprise twists, most of them eminently plausible”

DOH BEEFTGE

NORMAN NISSELL

Double Edge by Leslie Dutton and Peter Wadman. Marrion Street Theatre, Kallara, Sydney. Opened 14 April 1977. Director: Ed Young. Designer: Anne Hobbs. Actors: Peter Adams, Henry Mork, Max Meldrum.

Manager: Robert Knox: 10 rules to be followed by writers of detective fiction are meticulously observed in *Double Edge*, a new thriller at Sydney's Marrion Street Theatre.

With a sort of smug superiority, these are conscientiously set out in the programme and well, I think, have reputation as a reminder to any budding playwright contemplating this field of endeavour. They are:

1. The Criminal must be motivated early

on, not just brought in at the end.

2. The puzzle must be solved rationally, not by "supernatural" powers.

3. No more than one secret room or passage is to be used.

4. No "undercovered" or "underactive" persons.

5. No amateur detectives, particularly Chatterbox.

6. The puzzle must not be solved by a lucky accident.

7. The detective must not have committed the crime himself.

8. Nor must he conceal clues or reasons for his deductions.

9. A "Witness", if such a character be used, must not conceal his opinions.

10. There is a special rule against using identical terms or "doublets".

Double Edge, which comes almost direct from a run of nearly 12 months in London last year, is by English authors Leslie Dutton and Peter Wadman. They have conferred on several and impressive who-dunn-it which — in the absence of a butler — provides a means of design to discover (a) what was done and (b) who did it.

Obviously, consideration for future audiences inhibits too much elaboration, but the plot examines an attempted assassination of the British Prime Minister which resulted in April Monk, wife of the Home Secretary, being shot dead.

All this happens before curtain rise and we find Professor Helen Galt, in pursuit of her self-appointed task of solving the puzzle, recalling the incident by means of projected slides — made, we are told, from a television film — and a recorded description of the events as they occurred.

Were the worthy Manager Knox still alive, he might well also consider such elaborate detective devices because of the problems they present to the performers. Immediate timing is essential, and so many things can go wrong with the equipment it's a wonder the actors don't claim danger money! As it was, on opening, two minor technical hitches occurred that lessened somewhat the impact of the dramatic presentation.

But back to the plot. Mr Galt's wires get somehow crossed and two men vitally involved in the affair — a Left-Wing suspect on the run and the Home Secretary — meet unexpectedly in her apartment.

From this tense confrontation emerges a stream of surprise twists and turns, most of them eminently plausible.

The dialogue throughout is crisply economical and some of the laugh lines have so strong a local application that I suspect them of having been interpolated.

The play is lavishly decorated by dependable Ted Crag, with first-class performances from Anne Hobbly as Helen Galt, Peter Adams as the clunky Left-Winger, Tony Price, and Max Meldrum as Henry Monk, the plump-voiced Home Secretary.

Setting is Helen's extremely comfortable modern apartment atop Darvel College in Oxford, beautifully realised as an single-walled attic by designer Brian Nickless — another outstanding example of the attention to staging and present stage

that has helped to make Marrion St. one of our most successful regional theatres.

“John Howitt . . . is always a hysterically welcome sight on stage”

HELLO LONDON

BARRY LATON

Wills London, devised and directed by John Howitt. Kallara 680 Coffee Theatre, Kallara, Sydney. Opened 14 April 1977. With John Howitt, Peter Parkinson, Chris Popp, Jane Hamilton and Richard Hill.

There are some things in life that I look forward to with great relish. The last is sexual and I won't attempt to reproduce it here. But right at the top in my regular list is the Kallara 680 Coffee Theatre.

Perhaps one of these visits will result in my being disappointed with the show. Fortunately that hasn't happened yet.

I have in an earlier issue explored the style of entertainment offered at the Kallara 680. Over-simplified, it is more done in easy-on costumes in a high camp style.

Wills London lives up to the standard of previous shows and breaks new ground for John Howitt. My bill here!

I am very glad to report that John is back to full-time star status in the shows. He was thinking of being more into directing, as I mentioned in that previous *Wills London* review, I urged John to reconsider and fortunately for us all he has.

Whether it is as Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth II, a mistress, a wardrobe mistress, a dithyramb wine-taster or a dirty old madam-coiffing seducer of young virgins, John's six-foot-four-inch frame is always a hysterically welcome sight on stage. His facial expressions are incredible and his comedy timing superb. All the more brilliant, as he directs as well as acts in the show.

Peter Parkinson once again excels. I particularly liked his drink-in-the-wapnet sketch. Chris Popp makes the third member of the experienced 680 line and her great comeliness is put to good effect.

Two newcomers, Jane Hamilton and Richard Hill, both fare well and have quickly settled into the feel of things. This is Richard's first professional engagement and he made a good impression on the tough past crew that waits in the audience.

All of this sounds like a bit of a rave. But when you have such a marvellous night's entertainment, why not call him, says I?

This could well be the last show in the present format, as John Howitt has a move on new premises in Marrion. John looks forward to bigger and bolder things in the future. His new school of Dramatic Art is prospering.

"Shaw and Jonson both thrived on controversies and rivalries . . ."

THE ALCHEMIST CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA

Rex Cranphorn

The Alchemist by Ben Jonson. Old Tote Theatre Company at the Pacific Theatre, Sydney. Opened 11 April 1971. Director, John Clark. Designer, John Clark. Light, Jerry Hale. Stage management, John Frost. Cost, Graham.

Cast: Colin Craig: Face. Bruce Spence: Doll. Corinna, Neville McGregor: Sir Epitaph. Matthew, John Kenneth: Druggist. Peter Wheeler: Thomas. Sally, Peter Whelan: Druggist. Alan Talbot: Lovewit. Peter Collingwood: Philautus. Alchemists: Robert Phillips, Anthony, Stanley. Walsley: Crisp. Plautus, Kerry Walker: Lucius. Boudier: Boudier. Neighbour: Sir Officious. Officer: Michael Ferguson. Porter: Gary Graham. Neighbour, Maypole: Gaila. Officer: Grant Debnell.

Caesar and Cleopatra by George Bernard Shaw. Old Tote Theatre Company at the Pacific Theatre, Sydney. Opened 20 April 1971. Director, William Redmond. Designer, Simon Garton. Costumes, Mike Bradley. Music, Nigel Battersby.

Cast: Richard Vailie: Cleopatra. Robert Naeve, Aphelasia, Julia Wainwright: Lucius. Jacqueline Kuti: Portia. John Forsythe: Brutus. Mark Holmes: Lucius. Ben Graham: Bello. James Gamble: Titus. Michael, Harry Lawrence: Achilla. Patrick Ward: Rufius. Ben Collins: Charmian. Lorna Leary: Iro. Klaus Wehler: Servilius. Geoff Williams, Colin Allan: Ben Hyam. Portia, Achilla, Bello and Rufius: Eamonn.

I have been told that one of the great reasons of the box-office in this city has been the presentation of a famous play that has not been seen recently. Both plays currently offered by the Tote come into this category and both, especially the Shaw, should do the reason proud.

Jonson is perhaps doubly unfamiliar not only in his work performed infrequently, even by comparison with that of other Jacobean, but the very name of a play like *The Alchemist* — ironically, I assume — seems unfamiliar in the theatre, where having become the province of television or what remains of revue. But then I suppose Shaw is in the same position — *Caesar and Cleopatra* is not only infrequently performed but in its strong intellectual commitment to a world-view and in its partly debunking intention, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, too, is doubly unfamiliar.

In *The Alchemist* the characters speak a variety of jargons — alchemical, reformist, church, gambling, gallantry, pseudo-Spanish, contemporary lowlife, and trade — and this clashing intention (as in the juxtaposition between the play and the alchemist) is both the vehicle of the play's meaning and a sort of running symbolic commentary on it. This carefully observed, structurally consistent, and brilliantly articulated dialogue of jargons, which

must have been the keynote of the play's contemporary success, is now, at least to some extent, a matter for footnotes and careful puzzling. Acting, direction and a few decent word changes can still cover most of the meaning out of this dialogue, but it is still an unique and not the easy model that Jonson made.

On the level of scenes, the play is nearer to a modern audience's expectations almost dangerously near, with the (sexual) characterisation — casual encounters, offstage bedrooms, and post-stroke bed-and-bath — lead to expectations of something like nineteenth-century, well-made fare with a sudden denouement at the height of the complications. Jonson's plan is much more subtle: the return of the master and the deconstruction of the trickery is treated in full detail and the involvement of the master in a whole new constellation of plotting is designed to insist on the interweaving of money and greed in every part of the social fabric.

As for characters, the play has a rich assortment, the nicely differentiated Face and Scribe, their dogs Doll and the gallery of dogs that ranges from the splendidly excessive Sir Epitaph. Matthew to the barely named Al Druggist.

In all this — rich and varied language with a strong flavour of its contemporary time and place, careful plotting in the service of a heart-felt satire on human greed and gunk, and so lively a set of characters as a comedy could wish for — Jonson is admirable, even awesome. The negative lurking behind this tribute is my own lack of affection for the play and the playwright. I find it hard cold, condescending and not a little depressing. Perhaps that is only another tribute to his severity and his success in conveying a rather bleak world-view. Of course, people began saying similar things about Jonson and his plays in his own lifetime, and have gone on saying them ever since, but the reputation of the plays have survived very much on admiration and made do quite well without affection.

With speed the essence of the dialogue John Clark's production takes what is probably the only practical approach: he gives it to us clear and fast and the devil take the hindmost, while supplying a much action and business as the plotting can suggest to our faces the meaning. The result is that, if one does not have time to savor the depths of what is said or speculate on its resonance, at least the broad shapes of meaning are kept clear. John Kenneth's Sir Epitaph is particularly strong here: strong and capable vocal technique can make clarity at a spanking pace, even in some of the most high-flown language in the play.

I suppose one of the main problems in the presentation of such a play nowadays is the devising of a set which will support the meaning in the way we have become accustomed to expect of sets, while allowing the flexible and barely materialistic action severely designed for an open stage to develop as the playwright has written it.

Alan Lee's set gives good feeling of the period, although its construction betrays its intention by allowing raised beams to wobble and doors to bang to quaver. It provides elevated spaces down and a good sense of Scribe's kitchen/cellar below them. The only inadequate item is the low doorway from area which, with only a one-stage-level change, serves as both the street outside and the main room above, separated by an imaginary wall. For on the space were 100 doors, 100 are differentiated in the context of a set with stage and doors and levels. On an open stage, dragging everything else, I'm sure there would have been less sense of strained credibility.

Among the cast I particularly enjoyed the look of Bruce Spence's Face — to play a truly earnest called Face seems to demand interesting vocal casting and Bruce Spence is surely that. John Kenneth's Sir Epitaph becomes the best performance in the play, although he does not allow it to develop for us, to creep up on us. Instead he gives us the head-on impact of the character from his first entrance. I would have liked the quavering and doddering aspects, for instance, in a part is relation to mounting expectation of crushed disappointment rather than passion. Still, the performance is delightful and the daff humanness of the character makes him one of the more sympathetic figures in the gallery. Of the main characters, Colin Craig's Scribe seemed curiously uncomfortable and dull, missing on all of the tenderness and ease of the magic of alchemical alchemy. Stanley MacGregor's Doll is vivid in presence but left me with a feeling of disappointed expectations; Peter Whelan's Scribe and pseudo-Spanish is a tower of strength and absolutely convincing. How through Jonson of the set character who was through the deception is powerful to intervene and even, it seems, sympathize with the widow's. Kerry Walker's Widow Plautus is a kind of comic house that offers us Act IV and makes you wish she had come sooner.

Shaw and Jonson are not a bad pair. They both had sketchy education and a tendency to wear their education and its reclusivity a little conspicuously. They both thrived on controversies and violence while retaining a reputation for generosity and largeness in friendship. The following description of Jonson, while admittedly fairly generalized, could certainly serve for Shaw: "In person he was arrogant and quarrelsome, a good fighter but a staunch friend, warm-hearted, harsh, and intellectually honest."

William Redmond's island and un-demanding production of *Caesar and Cleopatra* will do well at the box-office for the reasons proposed above. It also has the advantage of the services of Robert Naeve.

If anyone had told me they were going to present *Caesar and Cleopatra* because it was a great part for an actress, I would have doubted the wisdom of the choice. When you read the play, the playwright seems to be all on Caesar's side, making

him "part black, part woman, and part god — nothing of race in me at all!" That doesn't leave Cleopatra much to be — a primitive, a devil child, a woman inspired by Caesar's conquest, aging but not condemned to fade by her own sagacity and femininity. All through the play, which debates love and sentiment, "vainglorious as Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra" by going to a "puritan" view of history, Cleopatra is a cross between a snoop and a shop-girl and, in playing, the battle can turn out to be hers. She is changing: the play draws out attention to her attempts to change, to her failure to do it, so her fatal weakness for "round strong arm'd" Caesar, on the other hand, witty, charming, intellectual, is nevertheless static. His character lies nowhere to go except towards grand old age and defeat at the hands of ungrateful mankind.

In his role as aquamanager, Lord Olivier presented Vivian Leigh as both Shew's and Shakespeare's Cleopatra — a balanced view. Of her performance as the former Tynes wrote "she keeps a firm grip on the narrow ledge that it is indispensably hers, the level on which she can be part, all, and apokeable, and fill out a small personality. She does, in the letter, what Shew asks of his queen, and not a semi-colon more." Ruby Nunn, whose career seems to have been dated with Vivian Leigh roles (including an almost-Scholar as well as last year's *Blanche*) needs no balancing role and gives more heart to the Shakespearean Cleopatra which, apparently against Shew's will, lacks at the heart of his own. Having seen the role played like this, I realize that Shew must have been well aware of the odds against his Caesar, but his emphasis on Caesar's speeches was only a determined attempt to induce a perceived imbalance. The part-woman in Caesar's character is not enough to hold out against the full tide of femininity as represented by Cleopatra. Richard Minkley sits back on his Caesar, content, it seems, that the words give him the victory. But Shew's wiles turn are confirmed and the actress walks away with the evening.

The production was unable to make the political situation in Alexandria any clearer to me than a quick reading had done. The set rattled periodically to no great purpose, exhibiting some of wood and canvas pretending to be other things, without even going so far as to give the first scene. No one plays off the Old Tynes's Pharoah and Pharaohs, "lying dead on the altar of Ra, with her throat cut, her blood deluging the white stone", leaving Cleopatra alone and child-like in the great marble hall, is it like a delusion and takes place in a space about the size of three phone-booths, fronted by a slender curtain. There's no much action in the play, but there wouldn't be time for it if there was.

Despite many shortcomings in the production, the judgment which gave us Miss Nunn as Shew's Cleopatra was wise and we must be grateful for it. I also liked Nigel Hawthorne's cross — the right blend of mystery, grandeur and Shavian

stink-up the very blend that the stage never managed to give naturally.

"I felt myself being lifted out of the seat by the sheer originality of what I was undergoing"

**MEDAL OF HONOR RAG
ALISON MARY FAGAN**

ROD ELLIS

Medal of Honor Rag by Tom Cole. Ensemble Productions, Intimate Theatre Sydney. Open on 11 March, 1977. Director, Brian Gordon. Designer, Doug Anderson. Doctor, time Goldman. Dole Jackson. First World Hospital, Guard, Lindsay Morris. Alison Mary Fagan by David Selbourne. Ensemble Productions, Intimate Theatre Sydney. Opening 11 March, 1977. Director, Michael D'Officy. Designer, Doug Anderson. Producer, John Verrier. Stage Manager, Rodine Fowler. Alison Fagan, Margie Brown.

There is a good deal of compelling evidence that live theatre is at an end. When the contents of it, as now is the case, force more and more management into putting on plays with casts of three, or two, or one, the burden on the playwright to grip or delight an audience becomes too great. The burden on the performer too, and only a few theatrical geniuses (Rag Livestock is used as handle) it. The general reputation cast number for an absorbing night in the theatre is 10: a play like *The Cherry Orchard* or *Twelfth Night* could not be written with a cast of three, or two, or one, and it's plain to see why it depends on an abundance of melodic interactions and melismatic counter-vantages that is not available in a cast of three, or two, or one. Imagine as a *Wanda* with only Hamlet and Claudius as it, or a *Death of a Salesman* with only Willy and Biff. Yet these are the kinds of shows that management tell writers make money now.

Anderson, moreover, are not all that interested in driving through the cold across a city in order to see three people grubbing in an outhouse about their lot when *Wanda* is available in bush and variety colour free of charge at home. They need more people on stage to drag them out at night. The most commercially successful Australian dramas also support this view — *Don't Purr*, *Merba*, *King O'Malley*, *Murphy's Town*, *A Hard God*, *Darklands* and *Season of Sorrow* all had casts of seven or more and so did *Maid* and *Supremacy*. Franciscan university in the theatre, like Franciscan university in the country at large, is bad company, and all it stops, the audience will shrink to one of those black holes in space, of infinite weight and deterioration.

Two small-cost amateur plays at the Festival in April, however, warranted gladly made the abstraction of their monochrome populations, and one succeeded especially. The other, *Medal of Honor Rag* through a more qualified success, locally dramatised, in one confrontation with a psychiatrist and one soliloquy the true case history of a Vietnam war hero wracked with guilt at being alone while all of his closest buddies were dead. The twenty-headed psychiatrist (Arnie Goldman), in his own words "a specialist in unexpected grief", and in the veteran's opinion a slacker, slowly bleeds from his agonised Negro patient (Fred Steel) an account of the incident in which he won the Medal of Honor — the burning tank the uncaring lump of charcoal that was his closest friend, his solitary survivor of 18 Viet Cong, one with his rifle-belt, and the recurring nightmare of the enemy reflected that completely mirrored in his face. The two represent from the death that war-torn his friends (the other was when he was considered the right before the battle) out of the tank that burned no more than he can bear, and in due course he recognises his guilt (the story is true) by being sent to death while holding up a grocery store in Chicago. Out of this material both playwrights Tom Cole and the performers make a little less than they might have. One lunge for bullet feedback on a screen and for more nuanced performance (though neither actor was at all unhelped), especially in the psychiatrist whose part had the potential of the psychodrama in *Agnes* — for the television play, in short, that it might have been. Brian Gordon's direction, however, has momentum and restraint, and the impact of the confrontation is considerable. That being said, it must be added that Fred Steele, a black American of noble bearing and some grace, has a large future as an actor, so impressive are his natural attributes, and so has Tom Cole as a writer, if they wish to seek a cast.

The second play, *Alison Mary Fagan* by David Selbourne, with Margie Brown as the one character in it, was an astonishing experiment, superficially comparable, I suppose, to *Wonderwoman*, but so much like it, really, though every bit as original. I felt myself being lifted out of the seat by the sheer symphonic originality of what I was undergoing.

In a sort of kiosk, inhabited only by a star-shaped glory-box in which are seven seated women, a woman with a square jaw, stocky figure and full bosom arrives dressed up as a marching-girl, introduces herself as Alison Mary Fagan, ex-Five, ex-musette in ludicrous denial her bodily measurements, first tripping down to black tights to compress them, and on a seat of luxury deposits the photo. "This is the body. This is how I am. I was born into the world to be happy, and I shall be happy, whatever it costs me. I shall be pure as a puppy."

She proceeds about the stage, with momentum like a ballet dancer's exercises, and makes a litany of bourgeois Negro

celebrating in a vividly suggested wedding-night at a virgin bride with a strong husband — attended with passionate womanly desires and long-gearing lures (let us play the part together, no, no), then, dressed as a nun, articulates a series of satirical beliefs (I shall be paid as a piety) involving Christ's chance possession of her. Then, dressed as nothing at all but covered with paint and in half-dark looking like one of Blake's perpetual swirling hamlets or one of Francis Bacon's vision of horrid nightmare, she reverts to the archetypal case-hard female, speaking in guttural intensity like those of T S Eliot (I am sick of this brute city you come at). The comedies and chances of the city who may as well go on all knees, articulates some long final cry of the female lion. I cannot hope adequately in this space to describe.

The writer, David Selbourne, an Oxford don, has in this extraordinary work brought desire back to the impact of its poetic Greek origins, and also said a few things about women which no other male apart from Ingmar Bergman has got anywhere near.

For the direction, by turns tender and hellhard and overtop with dark Miltonic fury, I have nothing but praise, and for Maggie Brown's performance, not only its womanly courage, but its irony, its vocal mobility, its acute grace. I have feelings approaching, well, worship not wholly unshared with, not exactly lust, but something stronger. With such a performer the audience unwittingly and very reluctantly becomes flesh of her flesh because they have no choice. She drinks them up into her moral universe: they become one with her. How she achieves this without any particular physical beauty or even the bloom of youth to fall back on is beyond me.

I shall trouble with the overflow of this experience for many months. I applaud the Basenfin's courage in putting it on.

"Malvolio translated into the ultimate burlesque, the silent-movie ghost of Buster Keaton . . ."

THE FIFTH NIGHT

DOROTHY HEWITT

Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare. National Theatre, London, Sydney. Opened 23 April 1977. Directed: John Bell. Designer, Ron Carpenter, music composed by Catherine Allen. Lighting: Murray Crisken. Warrior, stage manager, John Miller. Orsino: Barry Otto, Viola: Anne Brewster, Sir Toby: George Hearn, Sir Andrew: Robert Kurl, Sebastian: Tony Martin, Captain: Robert Alexander, Antonio: Simon Seal, Olivia: Anna Yukina, Maria: Barry March, Sir Toby: Brian Gordon, Malvolio: Sir Andrew Agnew.

Here: Patrick Melrose, Nick Fitzpatrick, Peter Carroll. A Friend: Robert Alexander. Last Officer: Graham Thurber. Second Officer: Robert Alexander.

After the Norman and John Bell's inspired *Much Ado*, audiences were entitled perhaps to expect a corresponding delight in *Twelfth Night*.

But this is another country, and besides the watch is dead. The two comedies are very different bottles of fishes. The surface gloss of the stars and the marvellous wit and style of *Twelfth* and *Much Ado* the perfect vehicle for the Bell production.

Illyria is a magical place with a dark side to its name. Viola has a mental sadness at her entry there, and the Duke is never half good enough for her.

Fast songs constantly of death. The Duke and Olivia possibly the folly of love, and the twins much love's conspiracy. The apprehensions and doubt at the heart of the play are both highly sophisticated and incredibly tender.

Ron Carpenter's stage design was a brilliant conception, but was it the right one? Slatted wood, plastic, plasterwork stucco with hand-paint, sun-pat as lamps, lapping light and water, the sound of gulls.

Typically Sydney to translate one of Shakespeare's marvellous transmuta- tions into Elizabethan reality? Viola is played by a boy (but not Olivia). The translation is marvellous. Viola and Rowland have always had a tomboyish swagger. It is part of their charm. But except for the first scene, when, draped and cosied in rough hair, he has a passing resemblance to the young, gamy Hepburn, Harold Kurl's Viola, under-mimed, with blonde fringe and knowing, slanted eyes, has a distinct resemblance to the Greek in *Prince of the Desert* as France boy in a war, her, depending upon a silent, mysterious, physical beauty. He is not an inventor, a brainiac, a career-off of doggerels, an advertisement, a coward, a wonder lover or a wanderer off himself, as Viola is. Therefore many of the great speeches tend to sound, not charmingly beautiful, but flat and underplayed. The personality here, and the play's delicate songs disappear towards Peter Carroll's Feste. An odd frowny too? John Bell's Illyria has a savage skinned centre. Therefore a savage Feste makes sense in such a world, and under the "Malvolio in the dark house" cryptic.

Chillingly, on the opening night, the "sophisticated" Norman audience laughed quite loudly at Malvolio treated in a straightforward, uningenuous stage under the brutal remonstrations of Feste Tugos.

I think that says something terrifying about our Elizabeth-Orange-Tan-Drone world and the blood spilling on its thousands of lounge-room carpets from the colour TV sets.

Which brings me to Malvolio, and a brilliant performance from Neil Fitzpatrick, one of our greatest actors. Here is a Malvolio translated into ultimate burlesque: the silent-movie ghost of Buster Keaton, complete with masked face, truck-

coat, spats, squashed hat, white gloves and running on the spot marks. He plays burlesque with a touch of wit, face with the dropped lower-lip, Mark Samuels' chin-scoops and black, black comedy in the dark house, like some divine variation from the old movie: however, somehow stayed into a world of Sir Toby in plaudits, Sir Andrew in love, and Feste in true melody with a pained face.

More than is Barry Otto as a misanthrope, handsome Duke in a dressing-gown "Chaparral in talism", and Anna Yukina looking unbearably beautiful in great hats and evening gowns, giving the audience some lines the Viola touch: a great comedy cast containing such observations as Drew Forsyth and Gordon McDonnell.

Why then are I uneasy about the Norman's *Twelfth Night*? The pace of the play will quaken and the fragmentariness due to the scene changes. Viola looks beautiful, but cannot compare with Neil Fitzpatrick or Peter Carroll, therefore the balance of the play is impaired.

It is a production which scores a kind of donee measure of blonde mirror-maged boys with high cheekbones and oblique eyes, a heavy brutal Feste without grace or command of all, and a brilliant surrogate Buster Keaton doing Mark Samuels comedy routines by a Victorian poet.

John Bell, as always, has created a super-world, highly intelligent *Twelfth Night*, but where is enchanted Illyria and the enigmatic Viola?

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CROSSING NIAGARA

MARGOT LUNE

Crossing Niagara by Allen Ruppin. Held at the Wall Theatre, Park. Opened 26 April 1977. Director/designer: Allen Ruppin. Riders: Robert van Marckelshoef, Carlo, Alan Rudkin.

Crossing Niagara is about as many things — ambition, fear, obsession, the pre- and take of partnership, the clash and complementing of contrasting temperaments. It's also a demonstration piece about that old preoccupation with the relationship of cardboard body and soaring spirit. One of all it's a play based on optimism. How amazing, in the context of contemporary theatre, to find a light-ray walker who doesn't end up falling to his death to illustrate the playwright's tough attitude to reality!

The real *Blondie*, as shown in the embedded 19th-century reproduction in the programme, had a solid, no-nonsense look about him. Robert van Marckelshoef, having very much the look, has to suggest an inner strength, which has to persuade us that he can, indeed, carry a man across the 1100 feet over the Niagara Falls. He plays the part as an arrogant, lecher, self-reliant, professional, a little vain. The costume — wood's rampers, contrasts amazingly with the easily bearded face of the character, creating a sort of Vader look — an Eisenhower subordinate in a circus tent, with a clothes-line background and underpants hung up to air. At the time of the play, *Blondie* is 43 and a celebrity, having walked tightropes ever since he was an ex-gilded boy-wonder of five. He achieves heart-breaking things suspended 360 feet above the ghorrs, now with a wheel's arrow now with an ornate pole. But he shows over the number of eggs he eats, and that is the point of contact with young Carlo, a determined lad with a telescope, who has been watching *Blondie* for 14 years — ever since at the age of four he covered the ambition to ride on the great man's shoulders and share his unique experience of walking in the great wind.

Carlo is an idealist with an obsession — a birdie with a plan of vengeance. He

wants to purge *Blondie* of the cheap commercialism his status involves. He also wants him to achieve the impossible — walking on air without the limitations of the wire. He bullies and pays homage in equal measure, and once *Blondie* has become convinced that the lad is more than a hanger-on or an opportunist, he becomes intrigued. Their dreams merge — they share the vision of space-walking, and the idea of crossing *Niagara* together seems to occur in a spontaneously shared moment.

The preparation and actual walk are a continuous exploration of their relationship: mutual dependence of contrasting qualities creating a third person, *Ajwan*, a new creature, formed by the two of them and greater than either of them separately. Also water their horses, because, as Carlo says, any fool knows you ride in the sun. Alan Rudkin, as Carlo, has just a touch too much of the boyish energy that drives them on, but he contrasts well with the implied, seemingly impenetrable *Blondie*: superness versus experience, wild enthusiasm versus caution.

Their confessions of dreams and fears and motivations take the play beyond the immediate concerns of a two-man team attempting a daring feat and become a psychological blueprint, archetypes in action. When we finally see Carlo perched on *Blondie's* shoulders, we do witness the birth of *Ajwan*, the creature that can both walk wire-fused and soar in flights of fancy.

The dramatic lesson (even though history records that *Blondie* didn't crash at 43) is sustained throughout the walk. During their final preparations Carlo has luminous stage light. Emergency measures are rehearsed at lever-pinch. And our concern works two ways. Carlo is unstable, he can either lose his nerve and bring them both down, or he can give way to his free-wheeling imagination and force them both off the wire in sheer confusion. Either way, he makes a dangerous backseat driver. But it is *Blondie*, drawn to the point of exhaustion, who saves our moment of panic. At the halfway mark he flings, and it is the victory. Carlo, who takes them across the rest of the way, gliding, weaving, piking, cagling. It is a mighty scene. Throughout, they manage to sustain the illusion of the tightrope with the bare suggestion of vertical swaying, while a swirl of mist, and distant thunder supports the dream.

The play is a mixture of poetry and profound and yet often teasing insight. The images of reflected sky-walking and the whole complex web of dreams and fears

take the play as far in one direction as the realistic and often funny verbal battles of the two men take it in the other. Usually the production attempts to mirror these aspects. The airy circus tent gives way to swaying masts, the dagger *Blondie* reads books while suspended upside-down from a trapeze, the playful muting of the boy with a wheelbarrow is superseded by more subtle muting of life itself when that drives the audience into the game of total illusion just long enough to become aware that they have, in fact, become involved in the game.

"The first two acts are intense and moving . . . But with the third Rudkin leaps off the deep end"

ASHES

CLIFF GILLAM

Ashes by David Rudkin. National Theatre Company. Directed by Peter Hall. Park. Opened 26 April 1977. Director, Andrew Jones, designer, Joe Cartwright. Stage manager, Tony Rogers. Colin Harding, Dennis Miller, Anne Harding, Pippa Williamson, Jennifer, Christopher, Valerie, Marie, Annette, Adolphus, Officer, Aerie, Leane, Doctor, Samsonides, Gynecologist, Sargens, Arnes, Adolphus Gillam, Joe Sam.

Going along to the Greenroom on an unseasonably hot April night, I found myself hoping with even more than the usual fervency that the real magic would be worked. Without acknowledging the Greenroom, a tiny little box of a theatre, makes a last try at an accurate 20th-century reconstruction of the Black Hole of Calcutta and one needs the real theatrical magic to transport us from the gross and fleshly earth where sweat trickles unattractively down the face and neck and the breath comes short and gaspingly in a fetal atmosphere of hot, thick and still air liberally suffused with the garlic after-douars supplied by the badly perfumed in the seat behind, who obviously enjoyed a pre-theatrical Indian meal. Without the magic, one comes away remembering little of the play and altogether too much of the discomfort of the place.

Unfortunately, the current production of David Radwin's *Aster* does not deliver the goods. It seems amazingly close, but ultimately fails. I think there are two reasons for this failure: the first is intrinsic to the play, the second to the director.

To begin with the play, *Aster*, is Radwin's first success after the powerful 1966 *Virgin Coast*. It depicts in harrowing detail the attempt of two sensitive and intelligent people to become parents, in the face of a looming inability to conceive. The extended agonies of sperm tests, ovulation charts, copulations by calendar are borne with by Colin and Anne Harding with the help of a wry and self-deprecating humor and by dint of a tender caring for one another. Finally conception is achieved, but, crucially, the pregnancy fails, Anne miscarries and in disappointment has a hysterectomy. Sterility is now a fact and Colin and Anne's last hope, to become parents by adoption, founders on the rock of a bureaucratic walling of "fertility."

So far so good — the first two acts are intense and moving. There is a feeling of autopsychography about it all, and some after scenes are also through with a process of unmoderate expression relieved as dramatic truth. But with the third act, and a long soliloquy from Colin about a return journey to his hazy and haunted, Ulster, Radwin keeps off the deep end. He makes the truth of Colin and Anne's shared experience of sterility a metaphor for the failure of will in the link to and then senseless slaughter of one another, a metaphor for the sterility of welfare-state government, a metaphor for our unfortunate tendency in a species, to pollute

ourselves and ourselves. A metaphor, in fact, for just about everything about which it is currently fashionable to be both pessimistic and concerned. And in doing so he overloads the play. A simplicity of symbolic reference is lost in a piece that achieves coherence, but in *Aster* is merely confused. The interconnected themes of senseless violence, disorientation and a general intention in which the spouses collaboration do not emerge in any necessary or inevitable manner from Radwin's depiction of the perplexed case of Colin and Anne, but seem rather as if they have been tacked on afterwards. Consequently Radwin is trying for greater "significance", has corrupted what could have been a very good play, and done himself a great disservice.

The confusion intrinsic to Radwin's play is detected in the Queensland production, by Andrew Ross's direction. With a play deliberately structured so as to implicate the audience in the action, as *Aster* does, the actors must maintain a fine distinction between sympathetic interaction of character and audience and the kind of actor/audience conspiracy more appropriate to true comedy or the epic drama. The director must insist on this distinction, and Andrew Ross has not. Consequently there is an inconsistency about the performance, which is most marked in the case of Dennis Miller, an actor of considerable talent who plays Colin. There are moments between Miller and Pippa Williamson (Anne) which are absolutely convincing, but there are other moments, particularly when Miller has the stage to himself when misjudged and once-by-play critics an alienation effect, which

runs counter to the kind of demand the play makes for our sympathy with its central characters.

Lack of directorial authority is most evident in the case of the support female actors. Adele Lewis, who plays sandy women, adopts efficient but friends required by the script. One scene calls for a particularly insensitive female called Valerie to chat with a bed-bound Anne about babies, pregnancy and related matters. Anne Lewis played Valerie as a broad comic type, and within the parameters of that type played her well, but the style was badly against the grain of the rest of the production and the director should not have allowed the misinterpretation to stand.

Pippa Williamson seemed better able than the other performers to maintain her composure in her part, and gave a very consistent and finely controlled performance, distinguished by a fine judgment of the character-actors balance maintained before Ian Scott playing sandy members of the medical profession and comely bureaucracy, did well with relatively un-demanding material.

The inconsistencies and confusions of this production are summed up in the frankly unhelpful contrast from Chris Lumsden's *The Sense of Being* which grants the programme and minimises its spurious insistence on somebody's part that the play is "about" the Irish Problem. It is a case of Radwin having tried to reference such a connection to *Aster* and having succeeded only in throwing up sufficient dust to obscure its very real merits, which mirror the honesty and compassion with which the protagonists of Colin and Anne are treated, an occasional marvellous use of language and, in the first two acts, a sure and economical management, some by means of a painful journey through conception to failure and sterility.

I dislike having to be unkind, so it's pleasant to be able to balance the foregoing comments on *Aster* with a few short, but laudatory comments on some similar (though currently going forward in Perth) The Undergraduate Dramatic Society at the University of Western Australia campus is currently presenting a season of three one-acters in headlamps in The New Dolphin Theatre. So far we have had Strindberg's *Credence* and Max Richard's *Cripple Play*. *Credence* was directed by student, Karl Zwick, who handled this extremely difficult writer with remarkable assurance, eliciting good performances from his student cast. The role of the wife was played by a young actress, Geris Scaris, who is possessed of a fine presence and mature control. The second play, New Zealanders Max Richard's harrowing monologue for female voice, *The Cripple Play*, makes enormous demands on the performer, who delivers, from a wheelchair, a scorching 45-minute speech laced with bitterness and irony. Two student actresses alternated in the part for the season of one week. I had the great pleasure of seeing Wanda Davidson give a fearless and moving performance



The next play will be the all-female *Rose*, and one hopes the high standard already achieved in the first two plays will be maintained. The existence of a pool of developing talent of the high order evident in L. DS productions so far this year augurs well for the future of theatre in Perth.

"The relentless pace of the production . . . allowed no time for the emotional patterns to develop"

ALBERT FRIENDS

HILL DUNSTONE

Albert Friends by Alan Ayckbourn. Norrnet Theatre Company by arrangement with Michael Corder, at the Playhouse Theatre, Perth. Opened 21 April 1977. Director, Aneuryn Young; designer, Anna French; stage manager, Christine Bradford.

Diana, Carole Skinner, Evelyn, Taffy Evans, Margo, Letha Taylor, Paul, Leslie Wright, John, Ian Wilkie, Colin, Alan Cassell.

The Playhouse production of *Albert Friends* suffers, from the beginning, a diversion to broad farce where more subtle direction and playing would have been in order. Aneuryn Young's direction concentrates almost solely on getting a quick response to the rather slender textual stimulus in the play, at the expense of the sustained comedy of characters which holds the play together and provides the basis for Ayckbourn's subversive reflections on suburban marriage. It could be that the director deliberately stepped up the pace and laid on the emphasis in order to get the play across the dead spaces which divide the stage from the audience at the Playhouse, but even so, the tone and pace of the production lacked variety, and the evidently mannered acting was no substitute for the understated playing of the subtext called for by the play.

As Ayckbourn has said in an interview, *Albert Friends* is far removed from the observed patterns of action of the "well-made" play. The main emphasis in the play is on character, and its action is deliberately scaled down to a series of conversations at a suburban (suburban?) dinner.

There is an element of tactically absurd contrivance in the action in that Colin, whose function has recently dwindled, has been invited to a tea by Diana to receive the condolences of three of his old friends, who, inexplicably, have not seen him for three years.

The other contrivance is that one of the guests, Evelyn, has recently had a "one-off" affair with Diana's husband. Diana knows, and Evelyn's husband, also at the party, confirms the affair because of his business interests with Diana's husband.

But this contrivance is only the basis for a more extended look at emotional patterns in marriage, which focuses the comedy on another kind of absurdity altogether.

The play quickly reveals the pattern of several marriages and relationships, which are in the process of falling because, in each case, one partner's genuine feelings and communicative efforts are rebuffed by the opposite partner's habitual insensitivity, selfishness, perversity or implacable hostility. The irony is that only the bereaved Colin is happy, indeed, distressingly happy, with his sentimental memories. He too, is one of the stranded survivors in the game of life.

The pattern of success which develops between the characters reaches a climax when Diana has a nervous breakdown at tea, a crisis which is partly precipitated by the discovery of her husband's infidelity and by her inability to penetrate Colin's emotional genitality. Ayckbourn develops this emotional pattern through skilful understatement and comic deflection at the crises which lead up to the breakdown in Act 2. Characters like Margo, who harbours her grotesquely hypochondriacal husband over the telephone, and Diana, who cracks after years of marriage to the inflexible Paul, are sympathetically depicted by Ayckbourn as victims made vulnerable by their own honesty and generosity.

Carole Skinner, as Diana, and Letha Taylor, as Margo, seemed to understand this anti-comic irony, but they pushed their performances to the ridiculous part at the production, which allowed no time for the emotional patterns to "gel" or develop.

They were also hampered by a lack of support from the male roles. Alan Cassell seemed to be acting in his interpretation of Colin as a pommie, granting props. The whole of the second act, and Diana's breakdown in particular, depend on the portrayal of Colin as a man with a rather

aply instance for emotional self-protection exposed as genitality. That is what finally disintegrates Diana.

To might be expected, the production came to great most seriously at those moments when emotions, which had been repressed out of deference to the second occasion, came to the surface. Such moments are characteristically accompanied by a touch of grimly funny bathos in 4 lower French, ensuring a very tactful balance. Diana's collapse for instance begins with the pouring of a jug of cream over her husband's head. Happily the pace of the second act, in which these crises occur, was pulled back a little, presumably in preparation for the emotional high points. For that reason the second act, seemed more promising, but any moderation of pace could not last to leave the stage freely on the sub-text.

Another weak point in the production was its failure to get the social backgrounds of the sets of characters into sharp focus. Perhaps the *Rose* of class distinctions in British society is difficult for us to grasp. The problem may be pattern 'em, too, may be our apparently habitual inability to appreciate the extent to which character is determined by class as a society based upon the gradations of class distinction. Class distinction is built with *Albert Friends* is a factor contributing to the conflicts and attitudes of the characters, and thus to a determination of the life which holds marriage. The lack of portraying the subtle but telling differences between the behaviour of a couple who have "made it" into the marriage class and that of a couple who are still "on the make" seems to have been beyond the stylistic resources of the present company. But then, there was no place for such nuances in a version of the play which selected mainstream for accurately observed manner.

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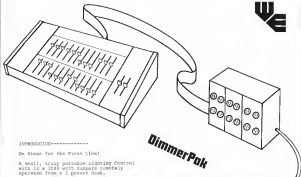
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**"On opening night
the actors were
far from working
as an ensemble"**

Juno and the Paycock

RAYMOND STANLEY

Juno and the Paycock, by Sean O'Casey
Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne: Opening 2
May Director: Ray Lambie, designer, Tony
Lapp

Mary Boyle, Natalie Boyle, June Boyle, Pat
Erlson, Anthony Boyle, Gary Brown, Jerry
Devine, Peter Gwynn, Captain Jack Boyle,
Frederick Parlane, Joan Daly, Edward Happle,
Sylvia Madeline May, Ben Baldwin, Carl Van
der, Peter Dunn, Charlie Bonham, David
Downes, Mrs. Maude Madigan, Sandy Jones,
Nephew, Sally O'Neil, Mrs. Thornton, Jan-
queline Keltner, Pamela Nugent, Robert
Gwynn, The Mother, Harry Hall, Pat Far-
mace, Matt, Ray Baldwin, Second Foreman,
Miss Helen Reynolds, Inspector, Peter Dunn

In the television ads, Ivan Hachtengen tells us that we won't see *Juno and the Paycock* on that station, we won't see it on any other station, at the cinema or the drive-ins, but we can see it that night and every other night live at the Athenaeum Theatre on "Channel 3". Perhaps it would have been better had Hachtengen arranged for us to see, among his Movie Melodramas

presentations on TV, Alfred Hitchcock's 1930 film version.

According to Director Hachtengen, it was "just a photograph of a stage play". But it did contain three of the 1935 London production's original cast: Sam Allgood as Juno, Sydney Morgan as Joxer and Maureen O'Neill as Mrs. Madigan. The Irish actors Sam and Maureen, together with the latter's husband, Arthur Sinclair, in fact acted in several productions of the play, with Maureen O'Neill playing Juno when her sister was unavailable. Juno was said to be Miss Allgood's favourite role, and she was still performing it on Broadway in 1940.

Lacking the film version, we have Ray Lambie's production at the Athenaeum, which, hopefully, will be as better stage when the company has given more polished versions. On opening night, after two dress rehearsals officially known as Young Parents' Preview, the actors were far from working as an ensemble.

When the lights went down, one was hit by a barrage of Irish accents of varying shades, which made the first quarter of an hour hard to follow. Now, there is nothing better than a much Irish brogue, and it can be quite hypnotising as Michael MacLennan has frequently demonstrated. It can also camouflage an indolent performance. Most of the members of the cast appeared so engrossed with repeating their accents it quite obviously affected their acting, occasionally Juno's Colac had a Scottish ring to it.

On opening night several people with whom I spoke, not acquainted with the play, considered the production had gone

somewhat layover and believed there was too much comedy creeping in. Yet, that showed critic James Agate, reviewing the first London production in 1925, wrote:

"*Juno and the Paycock* is as much a tragedy as *Macbeth*, but it is a tragedy taking place in the poorest of families. Mr O'Casey's extraordinary knowledge of English life — that he wrote his play for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. It was going to be allowed to disturb my argument — is shown by the fact that the tragic element is it occupies at the most some 10 minutes, and that for the remaining two hours and a half the poet is given up to farcical and incredible looking."

The background to the play is the Civil War in Ireland, but the production manages to make this appear merely a cultural, not never give a feeling of fear behind everything. Maybe this is what people meant by the notes on comedy.

The *Juno* of Pat Eversen seemed to be played throughout in a minor key. She appears such a nice, timid, unobtrusive character that one cannot see for one moment why her husband should be so scared of her as to hide his friend Joxer at her approach. It was altogether a lightweight performance, which, in my view, unbalanced the play, a prime case of mis-casting.

In contrast, Frederick Parlane's Captain Boyle seemed — much too loudly — and gave it the codicious of the "peacock" image O'Casey intended. One has seen Parlane play Irishmen in much more effect than this.

The stand-out role in the play is the short comic provided by Mrs Thornton,

grieving for her recently killed son. It is a wonderful part, and here was given full justice by Jacqueline Killester (Miss Ray Lambert, who had taken it over at short notice because of the enforced absence of Irene Managan). She brought out on one level almost the genius, the "biggest" and perhaps the lacking in the production's Jane.

One performance which seemed exactly right was Edward Hogg's Jane, every minute such as his looking and acting like an Irishman born and bred. The Mary Boyle of Naiside Bate grew in stature so that by the end of the play she was really fine, and Gary Brown, as her determined brother Johnny, also improved as the evening progressed. David Downes, the one actor with the MTC who consistently gives a good performance, was again a stand-in as Charlie Becham, the second husband of Mary.

Marian Madigan provided Sandy Gore with another character to add to her gallery of racial grotesques. In *Servants of the Servants* David also gave away appearance of being a drag queen, here she resembles Widow Twankey, straight out of pantomime, which is merely a disguise for the goodie as said Sandy Gore herself.

Despite performance and deficiencies in production, every so often there are wonderful moments when Fowler for whom one has the highest regard, has a firm grip on the proceedings. There are a few more for minutes, for example, when one hears the sounds of young Twankey's funeral parade.

Tony Trigg's set — a large room in a decaying house which has certainly seen better days and is now adapted to accommodate the impoverished Boyles — is fully up to his usual standard, which is very high indeed.

When the MTC mounted *O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars* a few months back, it was a milestone and one had hoped Jane would have reached such a peak. Alas, this is not the ingredients seem all wrong.

"A good student production gives a mediocre production by anyone else a run for its money"

THE PAINTED DEVIL,
PETER PAN

GABRIEL HUCHINSON

The Painted Devil by Colin Ryan. Melbourne University Theatre Experiments for the Melbourne University Union. Guide Theatre, Melbourne. Director, Edith Hall, designer, Barbara Thompson, lighters, Robert Hall, stage manager, John McCaughey, music, Kim Wright, Chiff, Denis, Barbara Chivers, Sydney Rod, Peter Bailey, Alex, Bernadette Brownlee, Graham, Greg Martin, Melbourne. "The paint"

MacKean, Julian, Terry Dwyer, Duke, Phil Griffith, Secretary, Geoff Jones. La Mole Actors, Barbara Spence, Lady-in-Waiting, Karen Judd, Prospector, Freda, the Matheson, Adam Stone, Peter, Bishop, Peter McWhinnie, Court Peter Benjamin, Dickson, Hilda Brooker, Peter Pan, adapted from J. M. Barrie. Fringe Theatre, Guide Theatre, Melbourne. Opened 14 April, 1977.

Melbourne University has been one of the leading forces of the Australian theatre, namely, I suppose, because those people who have gone through the place would rather forget the assistance that caused all that pain and appreciation. Also because, unlike American historians, "creativity" occurs in spite of the courses rather than because of them. Melbourne University has excelled as a sometimes benevolent, sometimes nasty culture where a great many people have done a great deal in the theatre.

Immediate examples are the Melbourne Theatre Company, which began as the Union Theatre Repertory Company and still maintains a few useful apprentices. Barry Humphries, Jack Hibbard, Graham Blundell and a number of others instrumental in the creation of La Mama and the Australian Performing Group. In George Whaley's time as director of student theatre, many excellent productions of new Australian plays were mounted, including Dorothy Heyer's *Chapel Perilous* and Bill Rod's *Trigonometry*. James McCaughey began Theatre Projects there.

More recently, under the current Director of Theatre, David Kendall, a new period of fruitful work has occurred. Recently, this year is reproducing a range of Australian plays to mark the decade from his last production of *White With Wine* (Riviera in 1967), and the important Hibbard season, *Breakout*, in 1968. Not coincidentally, this year is also the 10th anniversary of the first production of La Mama, again unsurprisingly a Hibbardian piece marked *Three Old Friends*.

But these birthday celebrations are not the only important things happening. There is also the arrival of several groupings of students and sub-students who seem to be committed to working in the theatre. Several shows last year including *Wasteland's Spring Awakening*, *Handbook's Offending the Academic*, *Chickson's The Scapellato and Shepard's Geography of a Horse Denominator*, were among the most imaginative that I saw. They were done by Melbourne University Student Theatre, Fringe Theatre and Melbourne University Theatre Experiments. That it is not to say that they weren't mediocre productions with a problem at least or two, only to say that, as student productions, they were exceedingly good, and that a good student production gives a mediocre production by anyone else a run for its money.

Two new shows indicate that last year's commitment has not been lost. They are an adaptation of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, by Fringe Theatre, and a new Australian play *The Painted Devil*, by Colin Ryan for Melbourne University Theatre Experiments.

Peter Pan, instead of being treated as a decision for itself, dreamy children has been turned into a dramatic adult entertainment. It comes a bit, including Australia as Peter, a gay dreamy male in Tinkerbell, a John-Close like Mr Darling/Captain Hook, and Wendy (again as Wendy and given plenty of room for interpretation of what really was an between parents and children, Wendy and Hook, and everyone with the pirates, mermaids and Indians).

The main aim of the production is the dichotomy between the real, mundane, boring, exploitative world of parents and work, and the free, dreamlike, imaginative world of children. Was these children, as Wendy at least, are growing up, becoming aware of their sexuality. It is still *Peter Pan*, but a knowing *Peter Pan*.

This style, of jump in time and place, of bizarre appearances, of nightmarish and magic has been achieved in very simple ways. The setting is just a blue floor with three white poles as it. The ocean is a parallel series of ropes a few feet from the floor. Mr Darling becomes Captain Hook with the addition of a twisted cane/hanger as one hand. Troops of Indians and Pirates and Lost Boys jump and yell from time to time. The whole thing does, however, achieve some sort of coherence. It could have done with half as has been chopped out, some of the grosser physical and vocal excesses pruned, and some of the parts better cut, but it was still, as an enjoyable evening. The use of rhetorical speech and some very formal, stream mechanical blocking worked quite well.

The Painted Devil, is concerned with just as weighty issues — life, death, religion, in this case. It is not so much a performance piece as a kind of experimental production by one Ross, a painter, accompanied by Akent, a writer, through various bizarre, beach-like experiences with madness and protest, actors and death. This Ross is some combination of Camille and Queneau and Brechtman, much concerned with observing and trying, notably, to figure out what his medieval Ship of Fools is all about.

There's a crazy Duke with an immense growth in his stomach. There's a group of wailing players doing Jades, or perhaps it is Jades. There's God and the Devil, with words by the latter. There's constabulars, the phuge and other assorted joys. There's a lot of Luis.

It is all such-up to give an experience extremely well performed, especially by Peter Finkle as Ross and Bernadette Brownlee as Akent. It's also a bit mysterious and religious for my liking, coming across as a sort of cross between *The Seventh Seal* and *A Street of the Angels* on, but there's no denying the integrity of Colin Ryan's production.

Colin Ryan is a playwright worth watching, but he, like all the current crop of actors, directors and writers at Melbourne University, will soon have to get out. There's no future there, beyond disappointing up the ivory tower never to be seen again.

Pure Shit Don's Party

"Although the subject of the film did not affront me, audience reaction did"



I'm a pretty passive sort of person and I believe in the rights of the individual to indulge in anything he wants to provided it does not interfere with the rights of others. So I have no objections to people who wish to take drugs, to have an abortion, or commit suicide. So the subject of *Pure Shit*, directed by Bert Becking, about 48 hours in the life of heroin-users did not affront me. I did not, like one Melbourne critic, find it "the most evil film ever made", nor did I find it one of the best new local films, as Bob Elks did. Though it was one of the best, it is certainly one of the better films from our current upsurge in cinematic creativity.

Although the subject of the film did not affront me, audience reaction did. In a scene in which Gary Waddell and friend build up a chance shop in their search for drugs, they are violent, which I abhor. Even though a monkey-wrench and a knife are used in the robbery, the audience were all parade with the thieves and howled loudly when a customer in the shop wheeled the knife from one of the thieves and cut him on the head. When a woman is produced and raped, the *Wasp* (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society does not have a monopoly.

Much space was devoted on the press to the portrayal of authority/establishment figures in the film as amoral/apathetic, brutal and/or stupid. But in the context of the film the depictions are understandable.

Psychiatrists have never been a strong love of mine since I worked at Sydney's Gladesville Hospital, and the smug condescension of Max Gillies in a television hospital memo who treats the merits of methadone treatment rings true. His condescension to drug users is appalling, and

harsh, and his threats are no more than experiments with two or three-page.

The police are presented as their derogatory movie phrase, "pigs", would suggest. And again, having had experience with paying off police (no fear, commissioner I have no proof) and being flouted by them for no reason, their portrayal as power-crazed human worms is spot on. The film, and I concur with the view, does not suggest that all police are corrupt. But to paraphrase a particularly apt line from *Boys in the Band*, "Show me a good cop and I'll show you a dead one."

As for the film itself, *Pure Shit*, or *Pure S*, as it was euphemistically called on posters and in newspaper ads, follows two girls and two boys in their search for a fix.

It shows that the addicts are the other side of the consumer coin to the capitalists and their disavowal with materialism. Both get their kicks from consuming, one from the "high" that his drug gives him, the other from the "high" he gets from material wealth and associated power. One spends his life working/striving to get the drugs he craves, the other works/strives for the power and prestige he craves.

The drug world is more openly hedonistic, but it, like Big Brother's world outside, has its own rituals in which one class looks down on another. In the film divided into heroin and non-heroin users, the punks, the cheaps, the addicts, and the offbeat. There is as much racism there as there is in the mainstream.

The milieu of *Pure Shit* is akin to the great "silent majority" who are "intoxicated" by newspaper and television current affairs programmes which are out to uphold the status quo. After all, the

thinking goes, if everyone was out enjoying themselves, who would run and work the factories? The film will probably find its audience among the converted, the university and alternative culture cinemas. It's a pity, for the lifestyle portrayed, albeit romanticised, is as restrictive and unsatisfying as the alternative. When does this leave the people like me who find little difference between what such culture offers?

Top of the repulsive stinks, however, must be the people who turn up at *Don's Party* on the eve of the 1969 Federal election. David Williamson's stage satire of ageing radicals comfortably secure in their well-paying jobs and their suburban houses has evolved somewhere in its transfer to the screen.

Don's Party is a play I love, but the film seems to have foregone much of its satirical thrust to concentrate on those elements yobbo Odium. I have very little patience with the film, directed by Bruce Beresford, which I find tiresome and plodding. The acting is adequate, but much of the cast were unable to bring much to life. Graham Kennedy is good as the poor sap who tries to photograph his mate making love to his wife, and Roy Barrett is good as the loud-mouthed friend of Don, but Harold Hopkins is too hyp and good-looking in the womanising Cooley. I longed for the cheeky maverickness of John Brown and, in the role of the Liberal lady, the scatter-brained quality of Wendy Blacklock.

The film offers a chance at self-flagellation, to apologise the Odiumers we all have within us. We all know people who behave like the punks at *Don's Party*. In fact, in one way or another, we all behave like them. The Odier tradition has dominated all of us.

I'm not convinced yet that Williamson can write for the screen. His stage plays do not transfer from one medium to the other. His larger-than-life stage creations become miniatures on film. In *Don's Party*, Bruce Beresford has opened out the script and had added nothing, and the film has lost all the satirical bite of its stage model. The words are the same, but Beresford has created, not a ridiculously witty film, but a boring bore-out.

The critics, falling over one another to show how sophisticated and anti-Odier they are, laughed on the outside while crying on the inside, no doubt compensating themselves on their lack of similarity to the characters. As for me, I found it a bloody bore and could hardly wait for it to be over.

Lingwood's crisis of identity

"I like to convey the gut feeling at the essential level where the audience is compelled to react . . ."

"If you are, like me, says Tom Lingwood, "more than just a designer, you can't tolerate the situation of being flung in with others in a producers' court. It's very hard to find a director one can make a happy marriage with in opera, it's harder yet than in straight theatre because there are three people involved: director, conductor and designer."

Lingwood, who has been resident designer for the Australian Opera since 1972, and has recently become a member of the Executive Board of the Australia Council, is talking about his most recent crisis of identity. His last job was one, he says, was largely responsible for his coming to Australia in the first place.

Then, in the late 1960s, he was disillusioned with the commercial theatre world of London and not particularly attracted to the money-dominated precincts of the television world. He was at something of a loose end professionally, but even so he felt some in this country, more or less by accident. He was lured by his first negotiations with the then Elizabethan Trust Opera Company, the corner of the Australian Opera. First he was asked to design Verdi's *Otello*, and then *Salome*, and each time he said Yes but the company changed its mind a second time and finally asked him to design *La Bohème*, which was to be directed by Roman Polanski and conducted by Carlo Felice Cilluffo, both of whom were in Europe at the time. Cilluffo was conducting in London, and Lingwood recalls having gone round to see him to ask whether he should have anything to do with this upstart company that seemed unable to make up its mind about what it wanted to do.

"You go to Australia," said Cilluffo, and Lingwood, impressed by the man with whom he had struck up a friendship that has lasted to the present, obeyed.

"I arrived to do *Bohème*," he recalls, "expecting nothing very pleasant, but I fell in love with the company." And what had begun as a tentative filling-in of a gap in Lingwood's career developed quite rapidly into a long-term association, if not always an untroubled love affair, with the company which has dominated his professional career since.

In addition to *Bohème* in 1970 he designed Verdi's *Faust* of Deshay at the



as an afterthought, in 1971 he did *Nabucco* and was expecting to do *Traviata*, although that fell through. Then he was offered Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* for 1972, an very early notice — so short, he recalls that he couldn't do it by post and told the company so. Whereupon he was offered a permanent job, and left London to settle in Australia where he has been ever since.

"I can't say I've not been pleased with the strength and success that have come my way during that period," says Lingwood, but increasingly he has ended up in conflict with directors he has found himself working with almost by accident. Thus since his current crisis of identity, which he now thinks may result in his embracing a whole new career as a design-director, it all started off, as so many things do in a creative life, virtually by accident.

"I seemed to be faced with a clear-cut choice," says Lingwood. "Either I could stay at the Australian Opera in some purely administrative capacity and give up designing altogether — which I didn't want to do — or I could get out of the AO and be a free-lance part designer. I was thinking about these alternatives when the Perth Carver came up in 1975 — a combined designer-directing one — and I tried it."

"It was a whole new thing," which had its problems, Lingwood says in detached recognition of the schizophrenic role any designer-director must play. "It takes time

to adjust — to achieve the dual viewpoint required in that situation. You must be able to let the design side relax, since you have done your best in that department, and look at the work solely from a director's viewpoint. In this situation you have an enormous responsibility to the performing artists — even more than as a designer pure and simple. It's enough to keep you lying awake at night."

Following the Perth Carver, which was acclaimed as a success, Lingwood was unexpectedly asked to be producer-director of the AO's 1976 Carver, an extremely short notice. The problems were numerous and Lingwood, anyhow, is not of sympathy with the view of Carver held by Richard Buryman, who conducted the opening performance of the production starring Margaret Tootyan as in the title role.

Buryman, he says, views Carver as the end of a French opera tradition, whereas he thinks about consciously set out in this work to create something radically different. "I was faced with the problem of either going along with Carver as a beautiful French opera of the Muscogues, Goussard sort or trying to bend the concept to the demands of the drama — a task like working within an extremely straitjacket," says Lingwood.

It was the production, as it finally emerged, an "a little conservative" it was, of course, planned with Donald Smith as its star. Don Rose, though Smith left the AO just before it opened and has never appeared in it, by the end of its first year, four Carvers and three Don Joses will have won the leading roles.

Carver is the third AO production in which Lingwood has had a directing hand: he co-directed the 1973 *Idas* with Stephen Hall, and his last design-directing one for the company was the 1976 concert-hall version of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. He agrees that Carver, at opening, was as dramatically as good as he would have liked.

"But we have been working at it very hard since," he says, "and we are winning. The company has come around behind me in the past year, we have gained a long way ahead and I've gained the courage and confidence to believe I am able to operate successfully on the level of a design-director."

"I know I'm still a beginner as a director, but I'm much more confident now that I won't let them all down. It's a great time when you're in the middle of a host of problems, but if you can fight them through they can turn out to be the best things you ever do. There's a tendency in Australia to get up at just the moment



when a little more effort would do the trick. Nothing worth while or memorable is ever achieved except by that extra attempt."

Right in the moment, Langwood is in the middle of one of those "green trees", beset by the problems involved in designing a new production of Tchaikovsky's *Snow Fairies* for the Australian Ballet — to be performed in Melbourne later in the year. Apart from a host of productions for Sydney's Muncie Hall Theatre Restaurant, it is his only non-operative work since he joined the AO. But he laughs when asked if this will be his first venture into the field of designing for ballet. It's only since he came to Australia, he says, that he's become so closely associated with opera. "I've always believed in a mixed-media career," he says. In fact, it was through a ballet he designed in 1951 that Langwood first broke into the big-time theatre world of London.

Langwood had a mad three-year career in the British Army — mostly paid for a *Sellout* or a Guinness comedy — during World War II. Assigned to a map-driving unit in the North African desert, he attached himself unofficially to a British drama company in Cairo and to his creditly spent most of his time of duty in the Middle East building theatres and designing shows to entertain the troops from Malta to Marsala to Haifa and Tel Aviv. When he was due to be demobilised, he was branded as a deserter and had some serious moments before the army finally let him go.

When he left the service, he spent some time in the English provinces and had enough success to convince him to try his hand in London. He had a rough time of it to start with, but eventually met a friend on a bus who suggested he should try the Ballet Rambert, which ran workshop sessions on Sunday evenings at the Festival Menier Theatre. Langwood designed an abstract contact ballet there in 1951, which went well, and after he had done a couple more, he was noticed by the London Festival Ballet, where he created a jazz ballet in 1952 called *Symphony for Fun* — which was so successful it toured the world for 11 years, and even reached Australia.

Then Langwood was on the way, and had considerable success not only in ballet, but in drama and musicals. At one stage, in 1954, he had six plays running at once in the West End for a short night. Then he was lured into costume revs on TV when it started in London, by the big money involved, and from that he moved into film. But Langwood had set his sights on the classical theatre — Shakespeare, Brecht, Shaw, Chekhov — and was thoroughly disenchanted with the nature of much of the work he was doing. During his career, he has had lots of success overseas with Shaw ("The Shaw plays are very operatic," he drops into the conversation as a casual aside). He has been asked by the Old Tote to do *Major Barbara* and *Cesar and Cleopatra* in Sydney, but has not been able to accept. But Langwood adds ruefully "To this day, at 30 years, I've not been asked to do a Shakespeare play."

The trouble with working in Australia, he says, is that you are so cut off from the world and so are your audiences. "Some people say everything's marvellous, others say nothing is any good, and both are true, of course, wrong. The way in life here is very much more American than British. I like the enthusiasm and energy, the slight roughness around the edges, the tendency for things to be blocked in rather than finely finished." And he sums up the performing arts the reflection, perhaps, of these national characteristics.

"What still exists here," Langwood says, suddenly focusing very specifically on the Australian Opera, "is that it's a company. There's a genuine enthusiasm and belief in what they're doing. In Europe you often get polish and style and detail at the expense of the heart of the matter — that's not even there, sometimes. I like to convey the gut feeling — drama, horror, etc. — at the emotional level where the audience is compelled to react. You can have an audience at with cerebral, but unless you can get through to them they won't come back. The basic thing is to grip them before you go for the deeper, more intellectual levels."

Yet Langwood does not feel the Australian Opera has succeeded as well as it could have — particularly over the past year or so, in the remarkable let down in the aftermath of the opening of the Sydney Opera House. "It had to make a huge leap in 1973," he says. "and then, having done that, the problem was to maintain the emotional charge necessary to keep us going top-rate performances."

Everyone knows by now about the

backstage difficulties of the Opera House. "As long as that building stands, it will always be a battle — like working with one arm and behind your back," says Langwood. "The company has given much to the Sydney Opera House, but the building gives a lot in return. It helped to get Australia on the world cultural map, the whole madness of ever having built it is an inspiration of a sort. Without it, would we have had all those other new arts companies the Adelaide Festival Centre, Melbourne, Brisbane, etc.?"

But after such a great leap as the one requested by Sydney's 1990 million sculptors of all art complexes, how does one forecast a sliding backslide? "You must have inspiration in the moment of decline," says Langwood, "in order to help you build up enough trust charge to give of your best at every performance. Otherwise the artists, only partly as technicians, they are infinite competence, but their work will lack excitement."

In the arts, he says, good administration is vital, and he is not uncritical of some aspects of the administration of the AO in recent years. "Management must be reasonable and capable, but it must also be part of the performance. However well it handles administrative matters, it will not be totally effective unless it helps to produce and maintain the necessary emotional charge within the company. We are talking humanity, human beings in dramatic situations are put stock in trade, and management must never forget this."

"Everybody involved in the company must be part of it, the performers, the backstage staff, and so on right down to the last secretary. There's no room for tokenism in a performance company."

As a private company, in a small world, says Langwood, the AO has its own peculiar problems, but everyone knows they will be together next week, and a sense of camaraderie can arise from that very fact. Such a sense helped the AO to cope with last year's financial crisis and the emotional let-down in the aftermath of the opening of the Sydney Opera House. "The company used to itself, it simply wasn't going to put up with going along the bottom of a trough, it must rise above it, — and it did."

Langwood sees a danger, though, that the AO may fall into a real artistic rut if it starts to watch out. "Sydney is beginning to take its massive two opera seasons each year for granted. Melbourne people feel they're in a trough because of the Sydney Opera House, they are waiting for their own Renaissance."

And suddenly we're talking politics, almost without knowing. The politics of the performing arts in post-Whitlam Australia, in particular. Logically, Langwood agrees, the AO should be able to make in Sydney permanently, but then he goes on without even pausing for breath to point out why this will not come to pass in the foreseeable future. Tourism, he agrees, is a big problem for any such company not only because it costs money in fares and accommodation of low prices, but because it



Christina Sarraceni and John Shaw

reduces potential box office income by restricting the number of performances a company can stage in a given period.

But it is a simple fact of life, and one we must accept: that Australia's national identity in the arts is based up with politics. The Australian Opera and the Australian Ballet receive massive funding on the basis of being national companies. In the case of the AO, even the occasional loans of artists to Western Australia and Tasmania have been cut off now Canberra is a mess, if only as a demonstration to the national government, diplomats etc., that we take our national franchise seriously. Melbourne may complain that it is hardly done by, but it is still on the touring agenda every year. Adelaide must wait this year but Brisbane may still get an opera season later in 1977.

"We don't games that we ought to travel," says Longwood. "Not when — if — Australians acquire an emotional feeling of Sydney as the nation's cultural capital would it be possible for the AO to sit there all year round? If it sat there now, under present circumstances it would gradually lose its national status. After all, of course, with its claim to such exclusive relations from the Federal Government."

And the AO is not necessarily substandard, as has sometimes been claimed, when it is out of Sydney. "We can be as good when we are out," says Longwood, "but it is a lot harder. Different orchestras, different stages, the the audience that has to every year in Melbourne."

What, then, is the answer to the opera

problem? If the AO, with the best will in the world, can maintain only a token presence outside of Sydney (and perhaps Melbourne), might it perhaps not have been better to split available Federal subsidies on ways right from the start and let each State develop its own opera company, even as each now has its own ABC orchestra and its own drama company? The answer is a simple No. "If the opera industry had been split six ways, you wouldn't have had any of the companies reaching international standard within 10 years." But eventually, of course you might have lost or lost Australian opera companies reaching international level.

But then, there's often more than one way of dealing with a problem, maybe, says Longwood, there's another way of looking at the opera dilemma which seems to be confronting Australia at the moment. "I'm very cautious and conservative by nature," he says, "but every now and then I get myself geared up to take a great leap into the dark."

"We should be looking much more at what can be done to improve the situation in the states other than Sydney: how we can present more repertoire in a more economical way. Shows could be mounted in a touring-style version in theatres, perhaps. We should be touring popular things to Brisbane — good entertainment — and possibly flying people to Sydney for the *Wozzeck* and the *Adieu Huguette*. A small-scale season at the Seymour Centre, including *Wozzeck* and *Shenando* at Cairns, maybe. The answer needs to always

necessarily be the expensive, elaborate ones if we don't become more adventurous in our thinking and give the artists will start looking bored — as if they're in a personality job."

In 10 or 15 years, when all the new cultural centres in the various States and when we may need two or three more major companies to encompass the full range of music theatre works, but I'm against it. I think the AO is the long run. It's much better to have several (strictly separate) companies each with an identifiable identity."

Adventurousness, perhaps, is the key word. "I still believe we should be constantly aware of the necessity to be adventurous and at the same time get it much back for each cent spent as possible. This inevitably involves taking calculated risks. It's a continual problem, too: one can be too generous, but it's even worse not to be generous enough."

Finally, though, every thing comes down to money while we just support an Old Time and an MTC and a QTC and equivalent drama companies in the other States with an annual average subsidy of about \$400,000. Australia simply can't afford the millions that would be required to support a similar amount of opera activity.

"As the Australia Council," Longwood says finally, "we have endless arguments about money, but money always has to be used to something happening. Dreaming about ideals and talking about money."

Too much of the sense that's what a reminder of the performing arts seems to be laid down to these days.

Pre-publication offer to readers of Theatre Australia

Directed by Ken G. Hall will be published by Lansdowne in late June at a recommended price of \$14.95.

You can reserve your copy now at \$12.50 post free for delivery on publication.

This autobiography, illustrated with personal photos and stills from his CinemaScope features and newsreels, recounts the life of the pioneer of the Australian film industry. In the shorts and feature Ken Hall made various feature films such as "Dad and Dave", "Captain of the Wilderness", and "Smashy", many of which were shown by

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the ABC under the series title "Click Go the Years".

A large proportion of the book is devoted to explaining the past, but Ken Hall draws on his long experience to review the current state of the industry, and in the latter part of the book he offers trenchant criticism of recent policies and constructive ideas for change.

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This offer is valid only until 15 June 1977. Copies will be despatched on publication in late June as stocks are made available from the publishers.



Australian Centre, International Theatre Institute



YOUTH THEATRE TO TOUR

The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association has been invited to take part at an International Children's Theatre Festival in Wales in July. The invitation was extended by the British/Welsh Centre of ASSITEJ — the International Association of Theatres for Young People — of which Australia is a member.

The production, which will be toured around Wales and England, is Anne Harvey's light-hearted look at the trade union movement in Australia, *IT's in in That*. This play was commissioned and performed by the Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education Company in 1975. Anne Harvey will direct the production with Bob Bridges (Tasmanian TIE team), Michael Sherry (South Australian Theatre Company), Nann Nagle (Major Mackintosh Mime Troupe, Melbourne) and Kate Wilson (Queensland Theatre Company) as members of the group.

The Australia Council will help the project and support is being sought from other sources. The company will leave Australia on 30 June.

Companies from Canada, Poland, Iran, the U.S., England, France and other countries will be at the three-week festival, based in Cardiff. It is the first time an Australian theatre company performing for young audiences has travelled overseas. Further information from ATPAA, 31/6 Parrill Avenue, Darlinghurst, Sydney, 2010. Phone 258 1676.

THEATRE OF THE NATIONS

The third world season of the Theatre of the Nations is being held in Paris from May to July.

Theatre companies from Belgium, Colombia, Japan, Poland, Romania, the U.S., Venezuela, Yugoslavia, and Spain have arranged programmes, and more countries are expected to take part.

Two workshops are planned, one organised by the New Theatre Committee, another on the situation of emigrated theatrical companies who are temporarily settled in France.

The New Theatre Committee is still interested to hear from experimental companies wishing to take part in presentation of work and discussions. Groups interested should write to the secretary of the New Theatre, Jean-Michel Ribes, Centre Français du Théâtre, 7 rue du Nelder, 75009, Paris, France.

MUSIC THEATRE TRAINING

The International Dance Section of the ITI has organised a 10-day seminar on music-theatre training at the Roy Hart Theatre, Arcueil, France, from 12 August to 21 August.

Practical work will consist of group exercises in movement and voice-training, as well as individual help in singing, acting and dancing. Instruction will mostly be given by members of the Roy Hart Theatre, although participants may give in instruction also.

The debriefing of the Roy Hart Theatre members to strengthen in interdisciplinary-working and life-style will be the last, structure which all participants will be obliged to accept.

No fees will be required. However, there will be a modest charge for accommodation. People interested in attending the seminar should contact the Australian Centre, ITI, Applications close at the end of May.

WITH HOLLAND FESTIVAL

'A Festival of Festivals', a festival of young performers for young audiences, is one of the exciting events, planned for the 20th Holland Festival, being held from 1 June to 21 June this year.

Musical and Puccini works will be performed by the famous Komische Oper from Berlin and the Netherlands Opera Company, contemporary dance performances will be given by Carolyn Carlson and Le Groupe de Recherches, from Paris, the Joyce Theater Dance Company and Jennifer Muller, The Works from New York, and the Netherlands Dance Theatre. The Dutch National Ballet will present Gluck.

The Birmingham Repertory Theatre will present *Measure for Measure*, by William Shakespeare, and *The Devil is in Asia*, by Ben Jonson, in contrast to the New York Shakespeare Festival's performance *For Coloured Girls who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*, dramatized poetry on the subject of young black womenhood.

Music-lovers will attend a wide variety of orchestral, chamber music, choral concerts and workshops.

Although Amsterdam will be the major centre, events have been planned in other parts of Holland.

People interested in obtaining tickets or programmes should contact the KLM Airlines office in Sydney.

ADDITIONS TO ITI LIBRARY

A Guide to the Australian Theatre. Edited last year by Jane Collins for the ITI and dealing mostly with professional theatre, its policies, education and management, this informative booklet also contains a section on TIE teams, youth theatre and puppets, as well as listing some contemporary Australian playwrights, university theatres, and a dozen Australian drama and theatre books.

Directory of Canadian Plays and Playwrights 1977. This informative directory contains synopses of more than 300 plays (including children's plays), biographies of 100 playwrights and an outline of the work of the Playwrights' Co-operative, Canada's 'largest fulltime centre for contemporary Canadian drama'.

The Playwrights' Co-operative 'publishes and distributes contemporary stage plays, promotes a reading and consultation service for new and developing Canadian playwrights, and acts as an agency and service bureau'.

Scripts can be ordered from the co-op as long as they are prepared, and discounts are available.

Copies of the directory are available for \$1 (Canadian) each to cover postage and handling from The Playwrights Co-op, 4 York Street, 6th floor, Toronto, M5J 1R2, Ontario, Canada.

HUNGARIAN PUBLICATIONS

BASIC INFORMATION No. 1

The International Dance Section of ITI has decided to publish information on the art of dance all over the world. The Hungarian ITI Centre is collecting, publishing and distributing information on professional dance companies' repertoire and staff, first nights and revivals, past performances abroad and participation in competitions in the current year and in the coming season. The first bulletin contains information from professional dance companies in Finland, Hungary, Iran and USSR.

Repertory of New Plays, 1976. This bulletin contains information and synopses of new plays presented in 1976 in German Democratic Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel and Yugoslavia. *Playwrights*. We have received an English translation of the play *Ardeur* by French playwright Guy de Maupassant, published by the Hungarian ITI Centre.



Audiences are burgeoning, but . . . "Has the AO done as much as it could . . . to fulfil its national brief?"

Sydney's deed, or at least low-key, musical theatre period between the end of the seasonal company's summer-opera season and the opening of its major subscription season early in June, has not been without interest — even stimulation and excitement — this year.

Even the Australian Opera itself has not tucked wholly into the touring woodwork of Canberra and Melbourne where most of its performing activities have been taking place; it has teamed up with the ABC to present a concert performance of Wagner's *Parsofa* at the Opera House, and it has evoked a positive barrage of big headlines in the daily and weekly press through the imagination of one general manager, John Winter, and the appointment of another, Peter Hemmings. Of the *Parsofa*, more soon, first, I would like to say a little about the change of helmsman at the AO.

Under Winter, who took over the Australian Opera in 1971, the company has made giant strides forward in the artistic area. Its general level of performing standards has risen dramatically — in the poem, indeed, where the name of the AO is increasingly known and respected in world opera circles. Audiences and box-office receipts have continued to burgeon, particularly in Sydney, where interest in opera was already rapidly escalating — in anticipation, at least partly, of the imminent opening season at the Opera House — before Winter arrived on the local scene. And despite tightening economic conditions in the past year or so, Sydney seems to be maintaining the ability to fill rather long opera seasons to a phenomenal 90 to 95 per cent of audience capacity.

But the AO's success has not been nearly so great in other cities, most notably Melbourne, where much shorter seasons have not been able to achieve anything like the same audience response. Regrettably, artistic levels have not always been as high in Melbourne as in Sydney, and certainly there are no longer any premises of new AO productions at Sydney. And there is no doubt that Melbourne feels keenly its isolation from the biggest things the AO is doing these days, just as Sydney opera-lovers were misled, a few years ago, when Melbourne and Adelaide saw *Two Girls and a Marry Coffer* in *Tosca* and they didn't. Edward Downes, Richard Bonynge

and Jean Sutherland have not performed staged opera in Melbourne in recent years, though they have been regular visitors to Sydney.

In view of the national brief of the AO, have the admittedly sherry problems of raising its biggest performing seasons been faced squarely and dealt with as well as possible during the Winter years? Admittedly, the immense costs of touring a full-scale opera company, has the AO done as much as it could to cover for opera-lovers in Adelaide, Brisbane and Canberra? There are people who love both art forms who insist that the Australian Ballet — despite a good deal more overseas touring — is fulfilling its national brief a good deal more effectively than the Australian Opera, showing its flags more Australian-wise, and more regularly. There are differences, yes, but there are a good many more similarities in the two art forms and the two companies.

In the repertory area, equally disturbing problems arise with the Winter years; for the only truly innovative period during these years tends to close in their beginning as to our debts on the debt of responsibility — or blame — Winter himself could properly assume after the event. The only major-born opera the AO has ever staged was presented in 1974 — first, a number of subscription performances of Peter Seashorpe's *Winter of Passage*, which was also heard later in Adelaide and Melbourne, then the double bill of Felix Weidner's *The Affair* and Lucy Skauby's superb one-act *Levi*, which received a paltry two performances early in 1974 and have not been seen since. The only other AO venture into the realm of homogeneous musical theatre was the disastrous Craig McGregor rock opera *Memo*, which had a brief, costly and wholly unimpressive run at Sydney's Seymour Centre in 1975.

There were other ventures off the beaten track, of course: the spectacularly successful production of Leon Janacek's *Jenufa* in 1974, the disastrous *dance/commedia dell'arte* programme early in 1975, the excellent presentation of Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring* in the same season, the good attempt at the Brecht/Weill horror musical, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* early in 1975, the innovative staging, strength of the

concert hall *Idola* in 1975. But the 1975 winter season was without a discernible innovation and no 20th-century work, or a single note of Australian music, is to be performed by the national company in 1977. Four of the five new productions for this year came from the pens of some of the best-known composers of the 19th-century, though not all the works are well-known. Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, Verdi's *Macbeth* and Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, the fifth, Gerald Franconi Aubert's *Les Diabolos*, was premiered in 1830 and is surely a lesser-known work in a thoroughly familiar idiom. We do not know, of course, how the blame for this retreat into the standard repertory ought to be apportioned as between Winter and his board, nor does it really matter. The fact is the commission itself does.

The economic crisis the AO has had to face in the past few months has had a parallel crisis in the equally — perhaps even more — important area of creative decisions: for better or worse, nobody really is the lieutenant of any professional opera company, but a series of artistic decisions, and continuing proof that a heavily subsidised company like the AO is conscious of its duty to reach as many, and as widely spread, Australians as possible — and to present home-grown works — is essential. Otherwise, why should the community at large bother to sustain a very large and expensive performing institution dedicated to preparation of an art form many people regard as antiquated, out of fashion, at the 1970s? Of course, opera isn't irrelevant to those or any other days, but it must be able and willing to articulate its own idea of its function in modern Australian society, to argue intelligently with critics, to tailor its hopes and aspirations to accord with realities, to control its operations when the economic climate is bleak, and to expand them when things are on the affluent upswing. It must continually be innovative in a way the AO has not been toward the end of the Winter years, regardless of who has been responsible.

Like Stephen Hall and Donald R. McDonald, who preceded him at the helm of the national company, John Winter has fulfilled a vital role in the development of the Australian Opera, but his departure is not necessarily the end of old things ahead for the company that some people have been claiming in recent weeks. His successor, Peter Hemmings, has an excellent reputation both as an efficient administrator and for his adventurous approach to repertory planning with Scottish

Opera, where he has been administrator since it was founded in 1962. We all regret the end of the long and mostly fruitful association between John Wheeler and the AQO, but if for one any very unfortunate that he is to have such a promising successor as Peter Hastings.



Both the AQO/ABC, expert version of Wagner's *Parafal* and the recent University of New South Wales Opera's staged version of Alessandro Scarlatti's *Draculo* were ambitious undertakings which didn't come off quite as well as they might have.

In terms of its long-term significance for the future of blackboard opera in Australia, the *Parafal* was far and away the more significant. I thoroughly disagree with those of my colleagues who have objected to the whole undertaking on the ground that it was a concert version of what ought to be a fully staged work. The biggest obstacles to the live presentation of all the late Wagner works are orchestral, modern stageworthy can cope with, or adapt to if need be the more limited demands of Wagner's incredibly detailed stage directions, but nothing can get round the grueling, musical demands of the music itself. Nor can one get round the fact that a big orchestra — a full symphony orchestra, and not just a normal pit orchestra of 70 or 80 — is required to do justice to these scores.

Nobody is more aware than I of the immense winter when by the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra in recent years, to the point where, at its best, even the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, generally acknowledged to be the best of all the Australian orchestras, could hardly be its better for standard repertoire opera. But the full-grown is quite different when one comes to late Wagner: even if players of sufficient quality are available usually, which is doubtful, it is simply not possible to augment an SSO to SSO are overgrown and achieve the monstrous ensemble so vital to do justice to the big Wagner scores in live performance.

Everything about these operas is testing in performance — everything musical in particular, and the great, unquantifiable triumph of the *Parafal* at the Sydney Opera House on 2 April last was the stunning performance of the SSO. Oh, and then there was Carlo Feller Cilliers, who reportedly was winning the bet for his first-ever Wagner performance! (He is to conduct all performances of the fully staged AQO Flying *Draculo* later this year, no mean feat in itself where one considers the fact that 16 of them, including an one-night-day period, are scheduled between 1 August and 14 October. In broad terms, the last about this *Parafal* was that the SSO lacked the distance or a night when all

the major principals did not all played magnificently from the 4 p.m. start to the end at 10.30 p.m. or so.

And Cilliers lasted it out too, of course — without missing a beat or flinching in his absolute control of the wretched performance. He was the unsupervised reinforcement of a musical experience that thoroughly convinced many of the sceptics, who had come prepared to witness an act of make-do Wagner, to marry on to the very end and go home thoroughly satisfied — even exalted — by the experience.

Of the singers, only Rod Hanger as Klingor was able to beat the orchestra without fail, but then he has only to last out half an act, usually whereas Kandy and Gormann have two big acts and Parafal himself a harrowing three. Ronald Dowd made a valiant attempt at the title role but could not quite match its demands. Donald Mackie's fine art portrayal of Gormann was superb, but he was miserably less effective in Act III. Leon Koppel-Winkel, inspired perhaps to some extent by Hanger's self-congratulation in Act II, gave the performance of his life in Kandy, and the audience rightly ignored the "kind request" in the programme not to applaud until the end of the performance, giving its warmest ovation at the end of Act II. John Shaw (Alexander) and Alan Lyle (Tremor) were both excellent.

Finally, one missed the additional bonus of a fully-staged *Parafal* much as one might as the lighting on a very rich and exotic gourmet cake. There was more than enough musical satisfaction to satisfy the most demanding Wagnerian appetite, but it would have been even more to have gone that last inch after having tried so many miles. Perhaps next year — and the year after that, maybe — a start on the very *King* itself.



The other major operatic event of the month *Draculo*, was an achievement of quite a different sort. Listening to Roger Corbell's recently cancelled *Scarlatti*, at the University of New South Wales' science theatre, was an almost unquantifiable joy, watching the unfolding of Bernd Bechtel's previous production on Fiona Kelly's stark scaffolding of a set made often evoked the heart-on-the-mouth feeling one gets while watching the death-defying high trapeze act at the circus — especially when one was forever being visually reminded that one of the principals, Grant Dickson, had been injured in rehearsal by the twin facts that he carried one arm in a sling and a non-quantifiable fieldman was always lurking below him just off stage, forever vigilant lest he should lose his footing. (Carolyn Vaughan, also injured in a rehearsal accident, was

unable to appear in the *Draculo* at all.)

There were too many terrific moments (some of the relevant parts, of course, originally sung by male quartets when *Draculo* was first presented in 1780), though it was hard to fault the singing of Beverly Bergen in the title role or Judy Glen as Lisa or Robert Clark as Doctor or Grant Dickson as Alfio. These singers were outstanding in a remarkably even out where there were few musical lapses and no painfully weak links. Dickson, in particular, is singing much better this year than I have ever heard him before. (In the March-April issue of *Theatre Australia* I inadvertently accused him of vocal shortcomings in the AQO's similar *Mayer Pater*, when I meant to refer instead to Clifford Gray, who sang Scarlatti.)

And despite the usual protestations of the production, it was by and large successful in attending the kind of unimpressive situation that is all but endemic to weekend-day productions of theatrical operas, with an unacceptably long act and its general lack of meaningful dramatic action built into the text and the score.



The Graham and Sullivan Society, whose *Malala* was all but finished alive by the opera theatre at the Sydney Opera House a year ago, coped a good deal more successfully with the venue when it presented *The Gondoliers* for a final season towards the end of March, though for all that, something of the sparkle and spontaneity of the earlier production was missing. Doug Kinnear's acts were perhaps a little too polychromatic, but not obviously so, Brian Phillips' direction and costume changes were thoroughly in line with the pace and the capabilities of the company. Brandy Byrne kept firm control of the pit and produced an overall pleasant musical result.

William Murray was an commanding Grand Inquisitor, and Dorcas Morrow and Patrick Harris were excellent as the three lovers of the goodness of the title. Gussie and Tessa Robert-Hartley, Mary Burke, John Worth-Lugan and Nancy Dutton were their usually effective allies as the Duke and Duchess of Plaza Toro, Marco and Cecilia respectively. Patrick Connolly (as Giuseppe Polverini, the baritone gondolier) was superb, setting a new personal performance standard both vocally and dramatically. The Australian Opera is to tackle *The Gondoliers* for a three-week season starting on 28 September in the same venue it will be most interesting to see how it copes with the demands and pitfalls of this piece, which is one of the more difficult G and S operas to bring off successfully.

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The real Rachmaninov?

"The Bells . . . is a splendid piece which gives us a new understanding of what Rachmaninov's career might have been . . ."

Rachmaninov is often spoken of as a composer of second-rank music with first-rank symphonies. Justly so, in my opinion, if we confine ourselves to the orchestral works by which he is usually represented in our concert halls: the richly melodious but dispirited piano concertos, the alternately torpid and gushing symphonies. On the evidence of his choral symphony, *The Bells*, we should probably view Rachmaninov as a composer destined to reach very high rank indeed with the setting of words in a vocal/orchestral texture but whose natural abilities in this field were stifled through the circumstances of his life and career. As an exile from Russia after the Bolshevik revolution Rachmaninov was cut off from the subject who should have performed his music in the language in which he set it, and from the choral organisations which would have looked to him for new works. In the West he had to make his way as a composer of symphonies and concertos, genres in which burdens of alien cultural tradition (in terms of social organisation and language) did not apply. The pay of this is that Rachmaninov apparently needed the extra musical stimulus and constraints provided by words to create truly convincing and consistently interesting and varied large-scale structures. *The Bells*, based on the poems of the same name by Edgar Allan Poe, is superior in cohesion, variety, impact and rhythmic interest to all of his purely instrumental compositions involving orchestras. It is, in fact, a splendid piece which gives us new understandings of what Rachmaninov's career might have been if political events had not derailed him in the heyday of the culturally humanist optimism of the 20th century.

Rachmaninov did not set Poe's words in their original form, but worked with a free translation made by the Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont, the same poet, incidentally, whose words Stravinsky set in his early and highly difficult choral piece *The Song of the Storm*. It is significant, therefore, to record the work with the Russian text that Rachmaninov evidently set. This is a daunting prospect for the English-speaking soloist and chorus assembled for the new recording of *The*

Bells made under Andrei Prokofiev's direction in London (HMV ASD 3334 stereo/quad compatible). I am not competent to say how successfully they interpret this challenge. Certainly, Robert Tear, the tenor soloist, has a great deal of experience in singing Russian and has recorded for Argo a complete disc of Rachmaninov songs (Argo ZRG 758). If we compare the new recording with the version made a few years ago on Melodisc/HMV (ASD 2338), we certainly notice a different flavour in the sound of the chorus and in some of the passages for soloists. This recording was made by Russian soloists and chorists with the Moscow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra conducted by Karl Khandashvili. Some of the differences, no doubt, can be accounted for by different methods of vocal production as well as by small differences in pronunciation. If this were the only point in favour of the older recording, it would not deter most people. I imagine, from passing hold of the new version. In fact, however, the older recording is a particularly splendid performance and will sound extremely vivid, immediate and generous as long as it is in interpretation. The soloists in the Russian recording are notably convincing. Mikhail Gornemann strikes the greatest contrast with his steady, clear and supple voice; he immediately sets the tone of the symphony's silver-tinged and cheerfully tingling opening movement. Robert Tear in the new version employs that vocalistic manner note which he seems to be increasingly setting and which makes him special as though he is preparing to take over the cantabile style of Richard Lewis. In addition to that, his voice has developed a very wide vibrato-rail. The combination of these factors means that he cannot easily persuade us that he is singing about the bells of youth, sparkling enlightenment, and slights in the snow. The other Russian soloist who is far from being matched by his English counterpart is Aleksandr Melnikov. His rock-like strength and freedom from over-expressive mannerisms make an altogether more awesome and authentic effect in comparison with the singing of John Shirley-Quirk. Shirley-Quirk is an extraordinarily intelligent bass baritone with a fine voice, but his style and

timbre give the impression that he is trying too hard to underline the points of meaning in the text and create an impression of realisation and intensity to please.

Unfortunately, the older recording is especially not so available except as part of a big box containing most of Rachmaninov's major orchestral works. This means that the new recording is the only one that most listeners will be able to afford to acquire, especially if they already have satisfactory versions of other Rachmaninov works in which they may be interested. With this in mind, we can take a more encouraging attitude to the new version and recommend it as certainly likely to win friends for *The Bells*. The recording is well proportioned and lively, even if some of its incidents are — and this is surprising from a conductor like Prokofiev — studded with less rhythmic precision than in the older recording. Prokofiev's main function as an interpreter of the work seems to be that he wants to make a good more engaging than his Russian counterpart. I do not think it needs to sound engaging, especially in the wild choruses of the third movement, which matches the nightmarish tone of Poe's words, and in the raw ferocity of the last movement. This suggestion of softening of force or a small addition of sugar or lily-flowers to the essence of the music also makes itself felt in the short piece that fills our side two, the famous *Vocalise* in Rachmaninov's own collected transcription. The *Vocalise* is a lovely work and seems all the lovelier when its wordless appeal is treated in an objective manner. Prokofiev, a conductor of real liveliness and wide sympathies, seems over-concerned on this occasion to press its words into place for our admiration.

For repeated listening I would prefer to turn to the original version for voice and piano as performed by Galina Vishnevskaya (prepared) with Mikhail Borovtsovich on a recent disc of songs by Rachmaninov and Glinka (GGG 2508 725). Although Vishnevskaya is far from having an ideal voice for the performance of this piece, the strategies to keep the vibrato increasingly evident in her singing under control and the tricks it is a song of some substance instead of merely a pious decoration. This disc of songs, in which the great cellist's piano-playing is particularly sympathetic, is a glimpse at its treatment of Rachmaninov but rather more interesting for its eight Glinka songs, which recall the simplicity and modesty of the earlier Russian song tradition and seem to wear better in repeated listening than the Rachmaninov songs, fine though these are.

Ray Stanley's

WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS



Lots of eyebrows were raised when Graeme Bandell replaced Lewis Funder for the tour of *Same Time Next Year*, yet in the London production same role, played by Michael Crawford, has been taken over (in eight weeks) by Derek Fennell. Looks as if the smash hit *The Twenties And All That Jazz*, with its cast, could be expanded. Two London producers and two from New York are all displaying interest. Don't be surprised if Frankie Roper and Brian Murphy come out in a comedy later in the year. Tale? George and Mildred of course!

Do MTC theatre director Nick Laughton, who was in charge of youth activities, has turned down job of assistant-director for the upcoming Broadway musical *Murder of the Moans*. Devised by Mel Shapiro, it was scheduled to open around April. Nick worked on the pre-production, but now it won't go into rehearsal until the end of the American summer, and if he wanted he probably would encounter major visa and money problems. Wonder who the co-impresario is who's trying to cruise Peggy Mount to make a second tour here? And there are whispers that George Wilton and John McCallum could be back, this time in their London success, Maugham's *The Circle*.

Some of the most unlikely people got to play Malvolio, which Neil Fitzpatrick has been doing at the National. I understand Tony Llewellyn-Jones was first choice, but was committed to a TV series that did not coincide. Vandyke (come) Max Wall has been playing the part in London. Oliver had a great success with it at Stratford in the 1950s, and Noel Coward once told me it was the first role in Shakespeare he didn't really have loved to act. ... Could be we won't after all see Harvey with Susan Serrini and Mona Washbourne And Miss Washbourne is such a good actress! Haven't read or seen Richard Brinsford's *Benbow*, but as the theme does sound a little like Sandy Wilson's *His Monkey Wife*.

Sad to hear of the recent death at the age of 44 of that gay actress Dorothy Raynsford, who, of course was co-author, with Julian Shute, of *Salad Days*, *Free As Air* and other musicals. I see Ray Winswell, who spent many years here (mainly in Perth and Melbourne) as actor and director, is in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Wild Oats*. And Mark

McManus, who did such notable work as *Sydney*, and was a big hit in JCW's musical *Half A Sempere*, has been playing Mark Antony in the National's *Julius Caesar*, with John Gielgud in the title role.

Theatre Australia editor Rob Page is directing a production of Dorothy Hewett's *Sub-Zero* and *Plans for Judy* for Newcastle University. A well-known actress will probably play lead role. And there's talk of Melbourne seeing a professional production of the play. I understand John Anthony, fresh from London, will soon be giving concerts. Maybe after Deborah Kerr has finished

playing in *Shew's Constance* (opposite Dennis Quaid) in London, the *Happens* in a bare May.

Now it can be revealed. At one time negotiations were taking place to bring Katharine Hepburn to *A Matter of Grace*, to be brief seasons in Sydney and Melbourne last April, but. . . . Mention in last month's *Theatre Australia* of Ruth Crawford as "first lady of the Australian stage" is being queried by folk in Melbourne, where Ruth is well known. Gloria Owen, Jill Perryman and Patricia Kennedy all seem more eligible. There was a time when George Wilton was depicted "first lady".

New local label's first release. Alex Stitt



Bill Armstrong probably believes in the Australian recording industry more than any other individual in or out of the business. Throughout his long career as a recording engineer, producer, and now co-organiser of a major recording empire, Bill has employed a quirky mixture of philanthropy and business acumen to launch artists, labels and albums into the Co marketplace.

Last month he was at it again, or rather it, when he released the first album on his new 'Jazz & Jazz' label. Tom Baker's *San Francisco Jazz Band* Bill celebrated the occasion by keeping the Sydney-based band to Melbourne for the month, where they performed, among other things, a free concert in the park and a Sunday night special in *Smash's Place*, the trad jazz Mecca of Melbourne.

In the faith, Tom and his music are an enthusiastic lot who perform engagingly and seriously, and their high spirit and accomplished musicianship are well represented in this, their recording debut.

The album provides a good cross-section of the band's extensive repertoire in twelve tunes from the 1920s — by Scott Joplin, Lu Warrion and King Oliver, among others.

Tom, a native of the West Coast of the U.S. who came to Australia as a teenager did not play jazz until 1972, after studying music at high school and university. Sydney jazz people will be aware of the tall 34-year-old Tom has regular appearances with several bands, and from the 20th Australian Jazz Convention in 1975, when he formed the San Francisco Jazz Band.

Bill Armstrong was at the Convention. He says, "I decided to record the band two minutes after I heard them. We got round to doing it last October. The recording session started informally, without much fuss. A few guests including Eric Chid were mixed into the control room at AMI Sydney. By lunch time we had 15 takes and 10 good ones. After lunch the band earned more relaxed. Another 12 takes, 7 more good ones and the session was over."

B

Drag Show

"A triumphant tribute to the pluralistic society in which conventional sexuality is not the only way . . ."



Drug Show: Interviewing Peter Kraus & Alan Hays. Edited by Steve J. Spier. The Plurality of Language. Franklin, Conn.: Press Pys. Ltd., 1977. Recommended Retail Price: \$1.95.

"At last, the Ultimate Theatre Book!" boast the publishers of Curran's *Drug Show*, and indeed the leather-and-pink-paged book which marks their entry into the coffee-table market does provide an assault on the mind and senses in a refreshingly rhetorical way. Two articles are written up as dramatic dialogues, and with female impersonator Holly Brown the motive urge directions ("Holly re-enters, sweeping expertly", "Holly, at a loss with the change of subject" etc.) actually dramatize the person. This is not only entertaining and readable, but it helps the interviewer get over some difficult moments, such as when Holly evades his questions about when is a sexual encounter she will make the one a man.

To most people, though, the great delight of first glimpses must be the pictures — I kept wishing for more. There are drug comedians, drag showgirls, porno dances, popular drag folk-singers (hereafter), transsexuals and casual drag-women, pictures from the plays, and an extraordinary picture of The Incredible Orlando playing Hercules in which his body seems quite divorced from its dressing. Some of the personal pictures are quite pitifully explicit, but the more formal ones require the kind of beauty which perhaps the whole book can define. By the time you've finished

looking at them, at any rate, the questions have been asked which, in my case, led me to read the rest of *Drug Show* nonstop.

Ironically, the publication of *Drug Show* marks the demise of pure play publication in Curran, as the Kraus and Spier plays disappear in the midst of articles on transsexuals ("Life is not a Drag", we are assured by Ray Lovremore), transsexuality ("I'll just be an older woman," hopes Ross Jackson), and legal problems associated with drag. A psychiatrist's injunctions against transsexuals, and there is a passionate conclusion to the whole by George Zdenkowski on the police view that transsexuals is tantamount to homosexuality, but overall this new book emerges as a triumphant tribute to the pluralistic society in which conventional sexuality is not the only way.

A husband belonging to Lesbians (the club for heterosexual transsexuals) tells of his wife's prohibitions against his dressing up at home, while another introduces us to his wife and mischievously tolerant children who call him "Dad" even when he is dressed up as his other half "Tim". The first man describes his realisation of the "femininity which flows within us" after he had posed with men who like female girth, thus Tim raises the question of whether transsexuals might not be "The most recent of all deviants". Through the various articles and pictures we are asked to distinguish between passive

transsexuals and female impersonators of the kind dealt with in Peter Kraus's *Men*. The psychiatrist, in commenting on the contrast between the two plays was Kraus's drag queen as a "pseudo-transsexual" effeminate homosexual, while he considered Spier's discussion rather a plain effeminate homosexual with his off-stage friend through a standard "heterosexual transsexual". I am dubious about the value of these distinctions in such a short article, but at least they inspired me to reconsider the speech of the characters to see whether I found his categories useful. His inclusion of Dick Emery and Danny LaRue would have further examination, as would his brief reference to transsexuals depicted in Shakespeare's comedies.

But perhaps I should not object to brevity in the article, as it leaves room for the far more valuable interviews with and statements by the men/women with whom *Drug Show* is concerned. Even so, with the tantalising inclusion of Andy Jack (before was John) except while this book was being designed? Wonder Woman and Cleopatra at the beginning, one cannot help musing on the popularity of drag in American theatres. If it is so, as Alan Hays suggested in a paper at the 1976 Playwrights' Conference, that the actor is essentially an androgynous being, then drag is much more basic to all drama and theatre than some of Curran's writers would have. Reminding us that most people are only prepared to tolerate "legitimate departures" from the "mythical norm" when they appear in art, New South Wales Civil Liberties Council Secretary Zdenkowski sees some possible criticism: effect on the last result this book can hope for. But surely, if all drama is of all sexes, then there is reason to think people could be confronted by the transsexuals they so love on the stage.

Certainly the book is catholic. Not quite my choice as a birthday present for my teacher next, it must nevertheless appeal to many people who want to look at the pictures and consider the different kinds of drag about which they may never have thought. While I was carrying the book around to review, numerous people, no doubt annoyed by the gross picture of Lovremore as the comic, stopped me to ask about it, and most of them had some kind of story or question about transsexuals. I have to say that most of those questions are answered within the book. All power to Curran and to their generously outspoken subjects who have put *Drug Show* so heroically within reach of the coffee tables. On second thoughts about it, I might just send a copy to my mother next.

GUIDE

A

CANTERBURY OPERA (47 0249)
Home and Away (Hampstead) in English (evening) on tour of ACT primary schools, involving child participation (1-4 June)

THEATRE THREE (47 4222)
 Canberra Magister's Society
Three Sisters from Antis Chabrowski, adapted and directed by Ross McGregor (1-4 June)
Miss Dora Lear (Gladys Lloyd) by Jim McNeil, directed by Ross McGregor (22 June-18 July)

N

NEW SOUTH WALES

ACTORS COMPANY (960 2940)
The Telling Room by William Makropoulos, adapted by Joseph Papp, and *Reverence and Goodness: An Ode*, by Tom Stoppard (playing in repertory from 7 June)

AUSTRALIAN OPERA (26 2576)
 Sydney Opera House (2 0949)
 Opera Theatre *Lacrimae Rorae* (Domestic) in Italian 4 June (ev), 7, 11 June (ev), 14, 18 June (ev), 22, 25 June (ev), 28 June. Conductor, Richard Berridge, producer, George Upton, designer, Kristian Fredriksson, resident producer, Michael Beauchamp, Jean Sutherland as *Lacrimae Rorae*

The Barber of Seville (Romantic) in Italian 16, 18 June, 19 June (mat), 24, 29 June. Conductor Richard Berridge, producer John Cox (rehearsal) by Michael Beauchamp, designer, Hager Butler
Fig. Ramolo (Auber) in English 15 June, 25 June (mat), 30 June. Conductor, Richard Berridge, producer, John Cogley, designer, Michael Sommer (costume), and Henry Harrison (sets), resident producer, Elke Neidhardt, Robert Gard as *Fig. Ramolo*

Les Contes d'Hoffmann (Offenbach) in French 13, 27 June. Conductor, William Reid, producer, Tito Caporin, designer, Jose Verano, resident producer,

Elke Neidhardt, Marilyn Richardson as Olympia, Cecilia, Antonia and Sella

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE, Newcastle (31 5841)

The Secret Backyard of Grief (Offenbach) in English 9, 10, 11 June. A Promenade Theatre production directed by William Abernethy, musical director, Greg Hickox

The Idiot's Menagerie, by Tennessee Williams. An Opera Theatre Group production directed by Frank Hahn and designed by Paul Nakone. With Barbara Marcell (from end June)

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (899 9222)

Chrysippos & Eliza by ..., by Michael Carr, directed by Raymond Osmond. *The Adversary*, by John Wakeham, and *Shoeshin*, by Richard Telford, both directed by John Wragg, all designed by Yvonne Tice (continuing on schools tour of north-west New South Wales)

BALMAIN BIRD (827 1652)
Handkerchiefs—by Reg Livermore, directed by Peter Bates (continuing)

BONAPARTE'S THEATRE RESTAURANT (357 2545 or 357 1946)

Crucial of a Lifetime, by Ron Fraser and John Mackintosh. With Heryl Chant and Korne Arnold (continuing)

BONDI PAVILION THEATRE (30 1211 or 29 5335)

The Lake Mags, by Robert Munn, directed by George Upton, designed by Wendy Dixon. With Brona Spear, Justice Saunders, Robert Faggetter, Max Collier and George Somers, (to 4 June)

CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC (27 4226 or 37 9371)

The Barber of Seville (Commedia) in English 14, 15, 20, 26, 30 June. Director, Ronald Jackson, musical director, Eric Clapham, set designer, Michael O'Hare

ENSEMBLE (924 8877)

Model of a Man: Egg, by Tom Cohn, designed by Doug Anderson, directed by Hagen Gordon, with Anne Goldswain and Fred Marx

Alone Man, James, by David Saltzman, directed by Michael O'Reilly, designed by Doug Anderson, with Margie Brown (continuing)

GENESMAN (817 3021)

The Glass Menagerie, by William Golding, directed and designed by Margaret Ramack, with Donna Allen and Pauline Lushington (to 31 June)

A Man For All Seasons by Robert Bolt, directed by Colleen Lifford, with Michael Brown and Elizabeth Searis (from 18 June)

HICKS HALL (378 5122 3411)

A Chorus Line, original production conceived, choreographed and directed by Michael Bennett, co-choreography, Bob Avian book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante, music by Marvin Hamlisch, lyrics by Edward Kleban, choreography and direction recruited for Australia by Raymark Lee and Jeff Hamlin. Last of 10 (from 21 May)

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY, NEWCASTLE (26 2526)

Hunter Theatre (to 27/9)
 Weekly by William Shakespeare, directed by Tullius Clark with Alan Becker and Pat Bishop, (to 18 June)

The Merrygown by John GDNopoulos, directed by Tullius Clark (24 June to July)

INDEPENDENT (924 1977)

Our Town, by Thornton Wilder, directed by Denis Folan, costume designer by Barbara J. Munro, lighting by Mick Schipper (to 4 June)

Macbeth, by William Shakespeare, directed by Colin Rennie, (from 8 June)

Forever a Good Man, *Charlie Brown*, by Clark Gumbel, directed by Hugh Munro, designed by Hugh Munro. With Hugh Munro, Craig Slade and Robert Work, (containing, Saturday matinee only)

KILLARA 660 COFFEE THEATRE (498 7553)

Wills, London, directed by John Howe, with John Howe, Peter Parkes and Chrissie Pepp (continuing)

MARIAN STREET (498 3166)

Quake Edge by Leslie Dutton and Peter Willis, directed by Ted Craig, designed by Brian Nickless. With Anne Haddy and Max Melburn, (to 21 May)

The Moppe, *Hamlet* by Georges Feytaud, directed by Alister Duncan, designed by Bruce Nighswan. With Lynn Rainbow, Mark Hamfield, Philip Hinton, Mavis Johns, Al Thomas, Kenneth Luff, Darius Parker, Guy Peck Green (to May)

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA (357 1280)

Rags, written and directed by Richard Bradshaw, and *Hande*, directed by the company, and directed by Richard Bradshaw (schools tour, Melbourne to Sydney, from 14 June)

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (960 4225)

And the Winner is or *Proofs as Paramount*, written and directed by Michael Boddy,

with Alison Harvey, John Allen and Anne Rankin (continuing)

ML 54C 149FT THEATRE RESTAURANT (977 6989)

Chry. Moss (with Judd) by Peggy Mortimer and Enno Toppens, directed by Peggy Mortimer, with the Toppens Family and Lee Young (continuing)

NEW THEATRE (519 3463)

The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare, directed and designed by David M. Hanna, (1-4 June)

Enter a Poor Man by Tom Stoppard, directed by Paul Quinn, designed by Andrew Blackall (from 18 June)

NIMROD (497 9803)

Upstairs, Downstairs by William Shakespeare, directed by John Bell, designed by Ken Carpenter With Neil Fitzpatrick, Peter Carroll, Barry Otto, Anna Yekina, Russell Kiefel and Drew Forsythe (to 11 June)

Mock Alle (about) Working by William Shakespeare, directed by John Bell, designed by Larry Edwards (with) and Ken Carpenter (continuing) With Robert Alexander, Maggie Blane, Peter Carroll, Ralph Cosham, Robert Davis, Josh Farr, Drew Forsythe, Ivan Kates, Deborah Kennedy, Tony Llewellyn-Jones, Rory Martin, Gordon McDougall, Stephen Thomas, Alan Tuba, Anna Yekina (from 18 June)

Domesticus: Gains by Richard Whorrell, designed by Richard Whorrell, *The Governor's Report* by John Sullivan, and *The Play* by Neil Potts (continuing)

OLD TOPE (663 6123)

Drama Theatre, Open House, *Company* by C. Pinter, directed by George Bernard Shaw, designed by William Madge (from 17 June)

Parade Theatre: The Abolition by Ben Jonson, directed by John Clark, designed by Allan Lorn, with Bruce Spence, John Krumholz, and Colin Currell (to 24 May)

Congratulate (it) by Colin Firth, directed by Peter Collingwood, designed by Yashu Tora With Ron Huddrick, Shane Porteous and Reg Gillian (from 4 June)

Yashu Theatre, Sydney Centre: Field Day by John O'Riordan, directed by Mick Rodger, designed by Anne Fraser (from 21 June)

QTHEATRE, Perth (047 38 5735)

Helen: The Master Song by Joe Orton, directed by Adrian Selzer, designed by Arthur Danks, (at Railway Institute, Perth, 19-22 May and 8-12 June, Civic Centre, Bankstown, 25-28 May, Manders Rehabilitation Centre, Parramatta, 1-3 June)

A Night Out by Peter Renna, directed by Kevin Jackson, designed by Arthur Danks (Railway Institute, Perth, from 22 June)

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY, WAGGA (944 21 2036)

The Company of Men by David Williamson, directed by Terry O'Connell (1-12

June and 15-19 June)

Rye Place, one performance (11 June)

ST JAMES LUNCHEON PLAY, HORNE (212 8530)

Alfons (about) by Terence Rattigan, directed by Peter Williams (to 19 June)

Somewhere, Looking by Terence Williams, directed by Peter Williams (from 17 June)

SYDNEY CENTRE (992 6554)

Domesticus: Gains by Richard Whorrell, directed by Richard Whorrell, *The Governor's Report* by John Sullivan, and *The Play* by Neil Potts (continuing) (to 28 May)

Another Evening, Another Company, schools program and new adult program (to 18 June)

Company for Men by William Shakespeare, directed by Neil Armfield, presented by the English Department of drama studies unit (from 27 June)

SPEAKEASY THEATRE RESTAURANT, Kensington (663 7443)

Now written and presented by Ron Challege and Collette Mann (continuing)

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE (2668)

Exhibition Hall *The Director of Sydney* (to 5 June)

THEATRE COSMOPOLITAN (500 0127)

Play Theatre Bank Practice by George Bernard Shaw, directed by George Bernard Shaw, designed by William Madge (from 17 June)

Parade Theatre: The Abolition by Ben Jonson, directed by John Clark, designed by Allan Lorn, with Bruce Spence, John Krumholz, and Colin Currell (to 24 May)

Congratulate (it) by Colin Firth, directed by Peter Collingwood, designed by Yashu Tora With Ron Huddrick, Shane Porteous and Reg Gillian (from 4 June)

Yashu Theatre, Sydney Centre: Field Day by John O'Riordan, directed by Mick Rodger, designed by Anne Fraser (from 21 June)

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6377)

Domesticus: Gains by Richard Whorrell, directed by Richard Whorrell, *The Governor's Report* by John Sullivan, and *The Play* by Neil Potts (continuing) (to 28 May)

Company for Men by William Shakespeare, directed by Neil Armfield, presented by the English Department of drama studies unit (from 27 June)

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES OPERA (963 3412)

Sweeney Todd by Stephen Sondheim, directed by Bernard Baskin, musical director, Roger Carroll With Berkeley Boggs (from 4 June), John Mann (King Charles VII), Neil Lunn (Guinevere)



QUEENSLAND

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)

Alfons (about) by Terence Rattigan, directed by Peter Williams (to 19 June, Wed-Sat 8.15 p.m.) With Jan

Conolly and Tom Parkhurst

The Shining Arm by Richard Beynon, directed by Arthur Radcliffe (from 20 June)

LA BOUTE (36 9913)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m., Sun, 26 June, 3.30 p.m.)

CAMERATA (36 6561) at the Avalon Theatre

The Shining Arm by Richard Beynon, directed by Arthur Radcliffe (from 20 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

COMMUNITY (234 9318/H 336 9926)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

HER MAJESTY'S (231 2177)

The Australian Ballet: Company (1-8 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

LIVING ROOM THEATRE RESTAURANT (231 2828)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE (36 1749)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (231 5177)

The Last of the Summer by John Ford, directed by John Ford, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY Not playing in June



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

FESTIVAL CENTRE (36 2382)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

Company by C. Pinter, directed by Richard Beynon, (to 19 June, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m.)

For Playhouse use SATC

ROYALTY THEATRE

The Phrygian by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, directed by Alan Ljovet (to 4 June).

SHERIDAN THEATRE (247 351)

(A Lot, A Lot, A Lot) by Barbara Han, directed by Helen Cunningham (to 4 June).

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY (31 313)

All My Song by Arthur Miller directed by David Williamson, designed by John Carrivick (to 18 June).

Too Soft (to 18 June) by Michael Cane and Ron Blair directed by Colin George, designed by Rodney Ford (23 June-8 July).



TASMANIA

THEATRE ROYAL (34 676)

Some Time Next Year by Bernard Shaw, directed by Gordon Hunt, with Graeme Marshall and Maureen Hayen (to 4 June).

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA

Rage, written and directed by Richard Bradshaw, and *Hand* directed by the company and directed by Richard Bradshaw (to 18 June).

The Marriage of Figaro (Maurice) by Pierre J. Spens, directed by Richard Bradshaw, designed by Larry Eastwood, with Gordon Chater (18-23 June).

Farinello's Farinello Gilbert and Sullivan revues, Marston Street production, directed by Ted Crag, designed by Ian Brinson (from 28 June).



VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN OPERA

The Marriage of Figaro (Maurice) in English 18 May. Producer, John Capley, designers, Michael Sweeney (costumes) and Henry Bardon (sets), conductor, Peter Robinson. With Cynthia Johnston, Nancy Grace, Jennifer Birmingham, Rosemary Rankin, Ronald Macneighbour, John Pringle, Robert Gard and Neil Warren-Smith.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 713)

Pratt Factory Front Theatre
The Wolf Family Show (to 5 June)
The J. J. Family Show by John Rimmer, directed by Carol Parker (from 30 June).

Pratt Factory Front Theatre

Expendable Arms by Jeremy Seabrook and the Pratt Street Theatre, England (to 3 June).

The South Show performed by The South Group (from 16 June).

COMEDY THEATRE (663 321)

Leader, devised, created and performed by Jimmy Logan, presented by Paul Elliott (to 21 May).

Doctor in a Fog by Richard Gordon, produced by Gerry Van Egmond and Paul Beatty. With Robin Norwell and Geoffrey Byrne (from 15 June).

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (663 321)

The Twentieth and All That Jazz, a musical production with John Goodrich, Candace Gilmore and John O'May, musical director, Michael Trank, choreography, Jillian Fitzgerald, design, Trina Parker, presented by J.C. Williamson Productions Ltd and Michael Edgley International Pty Ltd.

LA MAMA (347 603)

Two plays by Barry Eckstein. *The Interrogation* directed by Lew Linton, *The Score* (to 18 June) directed by Peter Green (19 May-3 June).

Let's Murder Marge, written and directed by Graham Parker (18-26 June).

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 626)

Comed Franchises and *Tin Soldiers* with Henry Mann, Frances La Cour and Jean Paul Ball.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (645 100)

Adrian Mole and *The Success* by Sean O'Casey, directed by Ray Lawler, designed by Terry Trapp (to 11 June).

The Wild Duck by Henrik Ibsen, adapted by Ray Lawler, directed by John Sumner, set design by Richard Price, costumes designed by Marie Maudsl (from 16 June).

Revised Street *The Fall Guy* by Linda Aronson, directed and designed by Mick Radnor (to 21 May).

The Club by David Williamson, directed by Rodney Fisher, designed by Shaun Gustin (from 16 May).

Theatre in Education

Julie Is On Her Way To, scenario by Jonathan Hardy. *The Reluctant Hero* by John Power, director Craig Shearer. *Man Friday* by Adrian Mitchell, directed and designed by Robert Love Company. A. Mervin, 23 May-3 June, Dandenong, 6-17 June, Oakleigh, 18 June-6 July. Company B. Bonchester, 23 May-3 June, Ringwood, 6-17 June, Fintona Gully, 18 June-1 July.

MORLAND THEATRE RESTAURANT (16 504)

Goose in a Cage, a musical revue produced by Tony Scranon (Mon-Sat).

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA

Rage, written and directed by Richard Bradshaw, and *Hand* directed by the company and designed by Richard Bradshaw (to 18 June). *Hand* directed by Richard Bradshaw (to 21 May), schools tour, Melbourne to Sydney from 14 June.

PLAYBOX THEATRE

The Marriage of Figaro by Pierre J. Spens, directed by Richard Bradshaw, designed by Larry Eastwood. With Gordon Chater (from 10 June).

REGENT PALACE (419 508)

The Rocky Horror Show presented by Henry M. Miller (to 25 May).

TOTAL THEATRE (663 491)

Let Me Preach Corp., a musical celebration of (and by) East Brisbane Inc, directed by Peter Bagg, presented by Eric Dure.

VICTORIA STATE OPERA (41 508)

The Marriage of Figaro (Maurice) by Pierre J. Spens, directed by Richard Bradshaw, designed by Larry Eastwood, with Gordon Chater (18-23 June).

Paper and Flowers and Things on the Three Lines of Fenchale Paper by Peter Mervin (on schools tour, Terms 2 and 3).

WINDSOR REFS (51 679)

Don't Suck It Out by Tony Barker and Gary Bray.



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CIVIC THEATRE RESTAURANT (71 135)

The Four Post, *New Stage*, with Anna Sepinsky and John Rennie.

HOLE IN THE WALL (31 240)

Exorcism by Tim Stappard, director, John Miller (25 May-18 June). With Edgar Mitchell as Henry Carr. *The Woman Fugate* by Ron Costman, director, John Miller, performed by Judy Nann. A late night show opening 5 June.

THE PLAYHOUSE (21 134)

Exorcism by Tim Stappard, director, Anna Nann (2-15 June). With Dennis Miller, Ian Scott, Alan Connell, Ian Nichols, Leith Taylor, Leslie Wright, Carole Skinner.

Grace Room
Grace Room by Alma de Graaf, director, Andrew Ross (opening 1 June).

WA BALLET

No public performances until September.

WA OPERA COMPANY

In reheat.

WA THEATRE COMPANY

In reheat during holiday.

The National Institute of Dramatic Art

at The University of New South Wales
Sydney, Australia

Applications are invited for
LECTURER IN SPEECH AND VOICE

Duties

To teach voice and speech to students of the acting course; to work with the directors of play productions; and to take other voice and speech classes as required.

Qualifications

Experience of teaching voice and speech as they relate to the actor, experience of work in the professional theatre and an appropriate teaching qualification are desirable, but not essential.

Salary

The salary would be within the range of \$411,850 and \$418,369, according to qualifications and experience. A superannuation scheme is available.

Applications close on July 30, 1977. Dates would commence in February 1978.

The National Institute of Dramatic Art is the first full-time tertiary school for the professional theatre in Australia offering courses in acting, technical production, design and direction.

Applications giving all relevant details and names of two referees to: *The Director The National Institute of Dramatic Art, P.O. Box 1 Kensington, N.S.W. 2033 Australia. Phone 661 2075.*

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE PERFORMING ARTS COMMITTEE - THEATRE BOARD

THREE ACTORS IN RESIDENCE

The Theatre Board of the University of Melbourne calls for applications for two (2) positions in acting in residence and one (1) position as an actor/director in residence. Applicants will be accepted from either individually or a group of three (3) actors (one of whom may be able to undertake a directorial role).

The positions will be for 6 weeks commencing June 20th, at a salary (inclusive of allowances) in the region of \$150/week.

The Board envisages that the successful applicants will work together to:

- (a) encourage the development of student writing for the theatre by workshop and production of student texts;
- (b) help to develop the quality of student acting;
- (c) undertake exploratory work in theatre of their own choice with a view to the presentation of work in progress;
- (d) provide a resource for the use of students in the teaching life of the University.

Applicants should have professional experience in the theatre. Written applications giving an outline of experience and some indication of how the applicant might approach the project should be despatched to:

*The Secretary, Theatre Board,
University of Melbourne,
PARKVILLE 3010*

Applications close 8th June, 1977. Further information is available from P. Gardner, Phone: 341 6026.

A T J BELL
Registrar



TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL MANAGER FOR NEW CIVIC THEATRE

Around \$15,000 negotiable

Applications are invited for the position of Theatre Manager to operate the modern Civic Theatre now being constructed by the Townsville City Council. The Manager will be associated with the final preparations for opening in about March 1978. He will be responsible to the Town Clerk for the viable operation of the theatre including marketing, planning, promotion, staffing, operating, maintenance and financial results.

This is a rare opportunity to establish the operation of a new theatre and influence the cultural development of a major city.

A background of successful theatre management and an established reputation in the entertainment industry are essential.

A salary of around \$15,000 is offered. A higher figure may be negotiated for an outstanding applicant.

Security: P.A. offers you complete security. No information is given to our client and no enquiries are made unless specifically authorised by you. Please forward relevant details quoting Reference Number 400650 to:

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Classified Advertisements

VICTORIA

CLAYTON THEATRE GROUP, *The Legend of King O'Malley* by Michael Boddie and Bob Ellis directed by Denis Nozle. From Friday 19 June to 27 June Clayton Audatorium, Cooke St. Clayton Bookings 333 2535

NEW THEATRE, *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets directed by Don Munro. Every Friday, Saturday, Sunday from 15 July to 14 August. The Odeon Factory, Page Street, Clifton Hill. Bookings 347 7923

TRINITY COLLEGE, *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* by Dorothy Hewitt directed by Ian Robinson. From 21 June to 25 June Union Theatre, Melbourne University. Bookings 347 4186

NEW SOUTH WALES

GENESIAN THEATRE, *A Man for All Seasons*, directed by Colleen Clifford. Fridays and Saturdays 8.15, Sundays 7.30. From 2 July. 420 Kent St. Sydney. Bookings 427 3033

BLACK STUMP PLAYERS present *Leschome Theatre* at 12.30 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays, State Office Block, Philip and Bent Streets, Sydney. Next production from 12 July for two weeks. Contact Tony Ralph for details 29 584

THE ROCKS PLAYERS will be presenting in July, *Impromptu for Lescaut*. French playlets in English, at the Grand Hotel in The Rocks. Can we offer to play in your Tavern or Coffee Bar or anywhere? Contact Bill Pepper 251 2155 or Blair Smith 221 2144



There is *Australian Classifieds* are \$4.00 per 30 character line (minimum \$12.00). Send copy and cheque to cover the above rate to *Theatre Australia Classifieds* 114 Cremorne Street, Richmond, Victoria, 3121 by the 31st of the month preceding publication. Copy received after that date will be run in the following issue.

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Late Letters

I have been made aware of your smiling and pensive remarks about Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. You have every right to say anything you desire about any activities as a minor producer of this nation, but no right to make a leading member of, not only the theatrical profession, but a distinguished military, insurance and a public service figure.

I can think of no finer words to say on this subject but to take the opportunity to endorse a detailed biography of Mr Fairbanks so that you will not make the same ignorant mistake again.

PAUL PELBOTT,
Sydney.

Coming up in



David Marr on the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust; Peter Kenna on Vaudeville Follies; Puppets and the Theatre Awards.

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Credits

Photo: Peter Melbourne 813, David Parker 13-15, 36, Dave Elliott 14-18, Michael Roberts 38. Bill Brown 25. David March 27, Miss Flynn 55, and the Hynes company.
Information service: M & L Casting Pty. Ltd.